

Healing

Psalm 27, Mark 2:1–12

Center Church, Hartford

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“Some people came, bringing to Jesus a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.”

Sometimes, when I read a story in the Bible, I like to imagine myself as one of the characters. Today I invite you into this exercise, and we’re going to try it two different ways. So, open up your imagination for a few moments this morning.

Let’s begin by imagining ourselves as one of the four people who carried the paralyzed man to Jesus. Our dear friend has been in pain and homebound for years; no doctors can help. We have heard stories about this Jesus who goes around teaching but also healing people just like our friend. We are determined to take him to see Jesus when he comes to town, but we certainly didn’t count on the crowds (it’s harder to imagine crowds these days, isn’t it?! We haven’t come this far for nothing!

Just then, a crazy idea enters your head. The house is built into the side of a hill, and the roof is made out of thatch. What if we climb

up the hill and go in through the roof! Fortunately, the other friends with you are just as outlandish, so you begin to climb, with some difficulty! Your friend who is being carried begins to object, but you, literally, carry on! He is heavy, and from time to time you despair of making this work without killing all of you. Maneuvering onto the roof, and then through it, your friend now lies at the feet of Jesus and your heart fills with hope where you have been without hope for so long.

Amazing story. Amazing act of extravagant love on the part of those four people. Here's my question for you as we move this story from the past to the present:

Whom are you carrying today?

About whom do you care deeply, willing to reach out in whatever way you are currently able, to try to bring healing and wholeness into their lives?

“Carrying” might look like literally carrying someone: a baby, a child, lifting someone out of a wheelchair. It might look like driving someone to chemo or to get tested for COVID-19. It might look like sitting in silence beside someone who simply needs your presence. It might look like gazing into a computer screen with a child, helping them do school in a whole new way. It might look like delivering food to a neighbor or a food bank. It might look like writing a check. It might look like praying fervently for someone, for essential workers and for a

vaccine. It might look like advocating for those who are suffering and discriminated against and oppressed, especially and still in the midst of a pandemic. Ahmaud, prisoners, those detained in ICE Deportation centers, among others.

Whom are you carrying? (pause) Can you see them? (pause) Do you sometimes feel like you don't have the strength to carry them any further? (pause) Now, imagine that roof open and Jesus there, waiting to touch whomever you carry. Feel the hope and possibility for new life. See Jesus look up into your eyes, a partner in healing.

Now, let's switch characters. This time we are the person being carried. You have struggled for years, slowly losing hope of getting anything like your old life back. You were a person who helped other people, not someone who needed help, and it has been so hard to accept that others have to do so much for you now. You think you should feel blessed that so many have stuck by you, but sometimes the bitterness takes over. Or maybe just the weariness. Everything is so hard.

So, when your friends approach you with the idea of seeing Jesus, you are at first skeptical. Faith healers come and go and usually without really doing anything helpful. "What do you have to lose?" your friends say, and they're right. They bring a pallet of branches with

a blanket and some ropes. They lift you up and call your family and other friends to follow, and you all head bumpily along to the house in the neighborhood Jesus visits.

Then, the crowd. You can hear them before you see them. You ask your friends to take you home because there is no way you will get in to see Jesus. But they persist, and when they tell you the idea about the roof, you almost lose it! If you didn't trust them with your life, you would scream bloody murder, but you do trust them. Against all odds, they open that roof and let you down to the floor below. Where Jesus waits for you. And before he says a single word, you know.

My question for you as we move this story from the past to the present is: Who is carrying you?

Carrying might look like someone whom you can call when it's all been too much. Carrying might look like someone who makes you a meal, takes you to the doctor or that chemo appointment or to get tested for Covid-19. It might look like a teacher or coach reaching out to your child. It might look like someone bringing you groceries or a batch of cookies just when you needed them. It might look like doctors or nurses, CNA's or pharmacists. It might look like an understanding boss or the co-worker willing to take on what you cannot. It might look like the grocery store stocker or check-out clerk or the auto-repair

shop or the bus driver. It might look like your partner or child or sibling or parent. It might look like your church.

Who is carrying you? (pause) Can you see them? (pause) If you can, you can also see Jesus. You are not alone. For those carrying us do not only take us to the Healer, they are the hands, feet, brains, heart and spirit of the Healer.

Beloved, during our lives, indeed I would say every day of our lives, we are in the position of one being carried and one who is carrying. In either case, God is involved deeply in what is going on, as one who carries us no matter our situation, and even if we do not perceive God to be there.

When you are carrying burdens for others and when others are carrying you, remember, and pray, the words of the Psalmist: Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! “Come,” my heart says, “seek God’s face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off or forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my family forsakes me, you, God, will take me up. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path....I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord. Amen.