

Letting Nothing Get In the Way

Mark 2:1-12

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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I was thinking the other day about how much we wait in line. The latest word on this is that if you live to be 70 years old, you will wait in line *3 years* of your life! If you add up all other kinds of waiting, like for stuff to process on your computer, like being on hold on the telephone, etc., the total goes up to FIVE years. And there's nothing you can do about it! No wonder Americans are considered some of the most stressed-out people in the world. You're gonna get stressed waiting; SOMETHING is getting in the way of you doing what you want to do, maybe what you *need* to do, and going on to the next thing you want to do. Of course, if it's something really important, like going to your doctor to be made well, then you won't mind the wait; or you might take some extraordinary measures to make the wait go away, especially if you're really hurting.

Here's a story about some folks who thought getting their friend healed by Jesus was the most important thing in the world. They went to some extraordinary measures to get it done. But they had company; Jesus was going to be doing some pretty extraordinary things, to make sure he got done what he wanted to do. This is all pretty good stuff to consider as we move along to Lent.

The roof on Jesus' house was a pretty tough thing. All the houses in Palestine in those days had roofs made the same way: you'd take big branches or limbs from trees, and lay them across the open area. Then you'd lay some others across them. Then you'd put on top of that some smaller pieces of wood; and on top of that, even smaller ones. Then you'd fill in over that with straw or thatch of some kind, lots and lots of it. This was all laying a base for the main component: dirt. You'd make up some mud, and

you'd put it on top of that thatch or straw, as evenly and generously as you could. When it dried, you'd do it again; and you'd keep repeating this process until you had a fairly thick *dirt roof*. Once it had baked hard in the hot Middle Eastern sun, you had something pretty strong! Except that when you got hard rains, some of that roof was going to erode away. It would need replenishing. So on each of the four walls of the house, you'd find a ladder going all the way up to the roof. That made it easier for you to rebuild the roof when the time came. Seems those folks were constantly working on their roofs, so any house you saw was going to have those ladders. You wanted to keep that roof as *thick*, and as *hard* as you could.

I'll tell you what else was *thick*: the crowd of people around Jesus that day. That made it *hard* to get through to hear, or maybe to be healed. In fact, the closer you wanted to get to Jesus, the thicker the crowds were, and the harder it was to move. There were plenty of people getting in the way. The way Mark writes it, the place was absolutely jammed. Once Jesus got to teaching, there was *no way* anyone could get to him!

Well, sometimes you just have to refuse to take "no" for an answer. Sometimes, you have to work extra hard, take extraordinary risks, to get to where you want to be. These four men came up carrying a paralyzed friend of theirs on what is best described as a padded stretcher. It was a flimsy thing. Most of those kinds of things in their day were flimsy. You can almost picture 'em struggling along with their friend carried aloft, can't you? From the way Mark words it they tried to get in to Jesus down there on the ground, but that wasn't gonna work. Way too many people getting in the way! *Most*

people would have stopped right there. Maybe they could wait until Jesus was done teaching, and then approach him. Seems like the logical thing to do, doesn't it? That's what I would have done.

But you and I can't measure the desperation – not from a couple of millennia away. There had to have been some desperation to these guys. Maybe they were afraid Jesus would refuse to do the healing, if they waited too long. Maybe they thought he wouldn't get done teaching before dark; because you remember, things *stopped* at dark in their society. Maybe they – whatever. One thing is clear: they were *letting nothing get in the way* of getting to Jesus, and getting their friend healed.

Now let's consider what they're about to do. They knew already that they couldn't go in on the ground floor. But there wasn't anything in the way of getting up on the roof! And if they could do that, and get through the roof, then there wouldn't be anything between Jesus and them, nothing but the space between the roof and Jesus.

But there *was* something in the way. That something was a *hard, thick, dried-dirt* roof. Some commentators have suggested that the mud was made from clay; if that's true, then that hard-baked roof was like brick! It wasn't going to be as easy as just scooping away some dirt. It might have been as hard as cutting a hole through one of our modern plywood-and-shingle roofs.

These friends of the paralyzed man staggered their way up the ladders with him, clumsy as that was, *dangerous* as that was, and got up on the roof. Mark's recording of this is delightful; unlike the other Gospels, he literally says they "unroofed the roof" and then lowered their paralyzed friend down through the hole. Do you know how hard that

must have been? We don't hear of them having any roofing tools! We don't know of anything except that they showed up, and they were so determined to get their friend to Jesus, so full of faith that Jesus could heal him, that they were letting nothing get in the way.

They didn't let "decorum" or common courtesy get in the way either, apparently. They were dumping an awful lot of dirt down on Jesus and the people below. Too bad they didn't have camera phones and YouTube in their day! That would have made an awesome video!

As you hear what transpired, though, it has a strange ring to it. Jesus doesn't simply heal the man. He doesn't even address that first. Instead he says, "My child, your sins are forgiven." What?!

What Jesus was doing was letting nothing get in the way of where *he* wants to go. And where he wants to go is the Cross. He *knew* that saying "Your sins are forgiven" was going to get in the way of being accepted by the scribes sitting there. But he also knew that being accepted by those scribes, or trying to be, was going to get in the way of his going to the cross. Of course, immediately the scribes react. They don't SAY anything, but they don't have to; Jesus understands what's in their hearts.

And the scribes were right! Only God can forgive sins. Their own views on what a Messiah was supposed to be got in the way of their seeing Jesus for who he really was. It was going to take something special – or maybe better, especially *powerful* – to prove to everybody who Jesus was. So he asks the question: "Which is easier, to say to this man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your mat, and walk?'" You miss

the subtlety here, if you're not careful. It's all about *proving* something. You can say all you want, "your sins are forgiven," and no one can prove otherwise. Forgiveness is kind of invisible. But if you tell someone to get up, pick up their stretcher, and walk, *that* you can see! Jesus has set it up nicely here; so he says: "But so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins – I say to you, get up, take your stretcher and GO HOME!"

Now I REALLY wish we had some video! This poor paralyzed man, who has just survived a right perilous journey up to the roof and down to Jesus, when he hears those words, he doesn't wait a nano-second. He hops up, grabs that stretcher-like thing, and maneuvers his way through the crowd and out the door! Which ignites a huge uproar and loud celebrating like none of them had ever done or seen.

Here's the thing: those people carrying their paralyzed friend weren't letting anything get in the way of getting to Jesus. And Jesus, by making sure he got started on his way to the cross, was making sure that nothing was going to get in OUR way, either.

Huh?! What?! Where did we enter into this story?

We entered into this story because Jesus wanted to let nothing get in the way of *our* salvation. *Our* becoming God's children, just like him. *Our* accepting the eternal forgiveness God wanted to give to all humankind, including us. See, those scribes and the Pharisees they belonged to thought they had it all figured out. They were so sure about that, they considered themselves experts on how to come to God. Their very cockiness and self-confidence on their standing with God was the *very big* something that got in the way, that kept them from God – just like the crowds kept those men and

their paralyzed friend from Jesus. Those four men went to extraordinary lengths to get to Jesus – something those scribes and Pharisees refused to do. You and I would be just as “blocked” from God as they were, except for one thing: *Jesus* did the extraordinary thing. His going to the Cross on our behalf removed everything that got in the way, that got between us and God. NOW it’s up to us to let nothing get in the way of the beautiful, love-filled relationship with God that was Jesus’ goal for us from this very beginning. We’ll need patience, more than we often show in lines of traffic, or lines at WalMart, or crowded waiting rooms. We’ll need to wait, and watch, and see what God wants us to do. Then maybe we’ll have a small fraction of the courage and determination that was Jesus, so we’ll do extraordinary things, and let nothing get in the way of the salvation, and eternal life, waiting for us.

We’re almost at the time of Lent, the time we walk with Jesus to the Cross and Empty tomb. Let nothing get in the way of drawing closer to your Lord and your God as we walk down that road...