Helping People to Jesus

First in the Sept. 2017 series: “A Place to Belong.”

# Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

# Key thought: These stretcher-bearers illustrate our responsibility to those who do not yet know Jesus.

# Intro:

True story: A man in the church in Kirkville had a very serious stroke. He was alone at home but he managed to call 911. The crew came and loaded them on a stretcher. He was a great joker, always making wisecracks. His attempts at humor were probably even funnier than usual as his speech was slurred by the stroke. He got the ambulance crew laughing so hard on the way out of his house that one of them actually dropped his end of the stretcher. The patient did make it to the hospital. But there it was discovered that the stroke was extremely serious. In fact, it was so bad, that later, his doctors told him he should’ve been dead. But God had other ideas. In answer to prayers and through some divinely arranged circumstances he made an absolutely miraculous recovery that totally shocked his doctors. He walked out of the hospital a couple days later, before they even wanted him to and went back to shoveling snow (It was Syracuse – remember). He just knew God had intervened. He’s still fine today. And you didn’t think things like this Bible story from Mark 2 happened in today’s world did you. You can read about that one in JoAnne’s book.

Today’s Bible story from the Gospel of Mark also involves some stretcher bearers. I think there is a sense of humor in this story too. Personally I can’t quite imagine the four buddies carrying their gravely ill friend around the crowd clustered by the door, up onto the roof, and then beginning to tear the roof apart over Jesus head. If they weren’t so serious about getting this man to Jesus, it would’ve been the stuff of slapstick comedy. But thankfully, by the grace of Jesus this story of a man on a stretcher also involves a completely miraculous ending for the bed-ridden patient both spiritually and physically. At the intervention of Jesus, he was up and walking before anyone expected it. And his spiritual need was met as well.

My interest in the story this morning is in using the work of the four friends to illustrate what it may take for us to fulfill the great commission. All of us as Christians are asked by Jesus to, “Go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). This involves in some way helping people to Jesus. These four guys helped their friend to Jesus. I think we can get some really good tips from them. How can we help people to Jesus? I think we can all learn a great deal by observing these four friends of the bed-ridden man. I see five actions in the story that I think apply directly to our work of helping others to Jesus.

# They saw a need.

## The four friends saw the man’s need

The first action that I noted is obvious, at least it should be. They saw the need! They recognized that their friend was bedridden and needed to be healed. It seems so apparent. Yet from a spiritual standpoint, even they did not see the spiritual need that Jesus addressed. For when Jesus healed the man who’d been brought to him, he said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). There was a spiritual need that the friends didn’t know about in addition to or along with the physical need. But I give them credit for at least noticing their friend was in need.

## We must notice the needs around us

All around us there are people in great need, needs of all different kinds. One of the great tragedies of the Christian church today is that we do not see the needs. We don’t notice situations that need compassion. We live in isolation. How important is the ability to notice needs today when compassion in politics seems to be in very short supply. The church must all the more reflect the compassion and mercy of Jesus. But we often miss those who are alone and need love. In our busyness, we go by on the other side of the road. But the friends of the paralyzed man saw his need.

## Let’s talk about the spiritual needs.

We don’t recognize the spiritual needs around us either. Sometimes we are not very aware of our own spiritual need so it’s no wonder we do not recognize the spiritual needs of others. Other times we are willing to admit our own spiritual need but we are so busy with the things of our own lives that we just don’t seem to have time to notice the spiritual needs of others. The songwriter wrote, “People need the Lord.” Do we believe that?

Maybe but, we often act like faith is only needed by people who are loaded down with obvious sins and addictions? But that was not the message of Jesus. He taught that even the Nicodemus’s of this world, the good people, and the people of stature also have a spiritual vacuum. We need to remember that the Bible says that the natural man doesn’t understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). To both the obviously immoral, and the seemingly whole, Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again (John 3:3). So we need to take a different approach. We need to assume that everyone has the need to be spiritually healed by Jesus.

Then we need to look for the moments in people’s lives where they are open to recognize their need. These are the most fruitful moments to come alongside and help them to Jesus. Research says that people are often open to God at times of change in their own lives; such as after a move, after a great loss, when a child has been born, or when illness strikes. At such times we need the support of others and we are often willing to look up toward heaven for help. These are natural times to invite someone to move closer to God.

# They had faith in Jesus to help him.

## The four friends showed faith in Jesus

The second action that I note that the friends of the paralyzed man took was this. They had faith in Jesus to help. Now this is a very important point. We often hear sermons and read inspirational articles about how important it is to have faith. But in this story, one of the surprising things is that the faith of the paralyzed man himself is not directly mentioned. But nevertheless, faith does play a big part in the story. Verse five says, “When Jesus saw their faith…” The most natural referent of the pronoun “their” is to the four men up on the roof who were lowering the paralyzed man down. It was their faith that amazed Jesus. They were so certain that God would help their friend through Jesus’ words that not only did they pick him up and carry them to Jesus, they took him up on the roof, and dug through the roof to make sure that he actually got to Jesus. Jesus was always amazed by people’s unusually strong faith. Here it was the faith of the helpers that impressed Jesus.

## We must believe that Jesus can and will help our friends too

The second thing we need to do when we are bringing people to Jesus is believe that Jesus can help them. Sometimes I wonder if the reason we don’t invite some of our friends, especially the tougher cases, to move closer to God, to open their hearts to Jesus, is because, deep down inside, we’re not sure even God can help them. Now we would never say that, but our actions show it. But we give up on people too easily. Remember the Apostle Paul had been a murderer and the worst of sinners, as he declared. But God’s grace transformed him!

I can think of another kind of time when this faith that God can help another becomes very real. Sometimes when we are helping a friend through prayer in a time of need, the friend may not be able to believe that God can help them. Illness, depression, or grief may be hindering their spiritual connection and making it more difficult for them to believe. In those times too, we can have faith for them just as these stretcher-bearers did for the paralyzed man. We can reach out to God on their behalf.

# They helped the man to Jesus.

## The four friends took action

The third action that the four friends took was to help the paralyzed man get to Jesus.

They did something active. They took action to bring about what needed to be done.

This is a challenge to us. Far too often, we are completely inactive when it comes to helping other people get to Jesus. We assume that they know where the church is. They can get a Bible if they want one. They can tune in on TV. Or even we may subtly think that it’s not our job to win people to Christ, it’s the preacher’s job. That’s what we pay him for.

## Jesus calls us to action in bringing others to him

But, the great commission that Jesus gave to his remaining eleven disciples was not just for preachers, it was given for all Christ followers.

 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt 28:19-20

When Jesus spoke to all those who were assembled in the upper room after his resurrection, he gave them the commission;

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” John 20:21

What was that commission?

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10

Jesus has finished the job of providing salvation for all those who would open their hearts to him. But the job of seeking the lost continues. It is our part. It is the way we help people to Jesus today. Paul said,

 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. 2 Cor. 5:11

Following Paul’s advice is not about twisting arms, or being obnoxious, rude and inconsiderate. That would be counterproductive. What he is talking about is actively using our influence and our opportunities to say a word for Jesus.

To those assembled at the time of his ascension, Jesus said,

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

James admonishes us, “Be doers of the word not hearers only” (James 1:22 KJV)

But how?

## Relish talking about something that you love

Let me ask a question. If you have a hobby that you really love; if you’re really excited about something, if it adds a great deal of happiness and interest and excitement to your life, do you keep quiet about it? The answer is undoubtedly, “No!” In fact, pity the poor unsuspecting soul the ventures onto that subject without knowing what they’re getting into. The other day somebody made the mistake of asking me about daylilies. They just didn’t know what kind of a mine field they were heading into. Out came the phone with pictures of my daylilies that I have been taking all summer.

Now friends I ask you. Are you excited about Jesus as the Savior and Lord of your life? Do you think he could transform the lives of some people that you know? Then, you should not find it at all strange to talk about Jesus; to give your testimony about how he’s changing your life; to recommend him to others among your acquaintances; to invite them to times and places where you will be at worship or at prayer or studying the Bible or listening to a pastor’s message. That which means something to you, you should feel perfectly comfortable to recommend to someone else.

The four men helped their friend to Jesus. What do you do to help your friends, neighbors and loved ones to Jesus?

# They persevered through difficulties.

## Things were not easy for the friends, but they persevered

The fourth thing that I notice about these four friends of the paralyzed man is that they persevered through some difficulties. They did not give up easily. They could’ve gotten discouraged when they saw the huge crowds in the small house. They could have totally given up on the idea of squeezing in there somehow with a stretcher. They could’ve gotten angry or disgusted that all their efforts so far were seemingly wasted. But not these four. They simply looked for more possibilities and ways to persevere in their task. They thought of another approach. Up on the roof they went, stretcher and all. They tore it up and let the man down through it to Jesus.

## Jesus asks us to persevere through hardships

If we want to help others to Jesus, one of the characteristics that will be required of us is perseverance. When my brothers and I were small children, I still remember a set of moral tales that my mother used to read to us. Fittingly, they were about kittens. I don’t remember any of the stories but I have never forgotten the punchline---Purr-severance wins!

Jesus talked about four different kinds of soil and what happens to the seed in the four kinds of soil. The seed is the Word of God and the soil is our heart. When Jesus explained the parable and talked about the good soil, he spoke about perseverance.

As for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.
Luke 8:15 NRSV

This phrase—patient endurance—is also found in the book of Revelation more than once. The churches at Ephesus, Thyatira and Philadelphia are commended for showing this characteristic (Rev. 2:2, 19; 3:10). Then during the descriptions of the trials of the last times, twice John pauses to send a crucial message to the churches to whom he was writing.

 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Rev 14:12 NIV (also Rev. 13:10)

What’s the message? While we are being witnesses for Jesus, perseverance will be required to finish our task. We will have difficulties to overcome with God’s help.

So don’t expect that it will be easy. And don’t give up when the person you prayed for doesn’t come to church the first time you ask them to come with you. Rather, persevere in using your influence on behalf of Jesus.

# Jesus rewarded them.

## When the paralyzed man was healed, the friends saw their reward

The final observation that I make about the four friends in their efforts to bring their paralyzed buddy to Jesus is this. Jesus rewarded them. He noticed! He paid attention to the needs of the man who would been brought. That was their immediate reward.

What a surprising joy it must’ve been for the friends up on the roof when Jesus met the spiritual need of their friend by proclaiming that his sins had been forgiven. Then imagine their double joy to see their paralyzed friend stand up, pick up his own sleeping mat, and walk out in front of everybody! I can just imagine the celebration on the roof. What a reward for their compassion, their helpful action, and their perseverance.

## We will be rewarded for helping others too

Jesus has promised that he will notice those things that are done for him and for others however large or small they might be.

If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” Matt 10:42

We have Jesus’ word that he will notice. What more do we need!

# Conclusion

May I ask you a question? Who were the stretcher-bearers that brought you to Jesus? Who were the friends who helped to introduce you to your Savior? You know how important they have been to you. Now it’s your turn to help someone else in the same way. Will you commit yourself to be open for God to use you in that way? Will you actively look for opportunities to help someone else to Jesus?