

**Take Up Your Mat and Go Home**, January 12, 2020, St. Timothy, Burnaby  
Ps 103.6-14; Mark 2.1-22

*Lord of forgiveness, you healed a paralytic by forgiving his sins. Forgive us, heal us, and teach us to walk in your ways. Amen.*

What would it take for you to change your routine?

As a parent, I can say that personally, much of my life feels as though it is geared toward *creating* routine—it would take a lot for me to change it.

Sometimes I worry about myself and wonder if I'm a slave to my routine. What would it take for me to do something different? What would have to happen for me to try a different approach than the one I'm used to?

Perhaps this is you, too. Or, perhaps this is another sermon I'm preaching to myself.

I worry that the reason more people don't come to church is because it doesn't fit into their schedules. You are all here today, and that's wonderful. But I wonder for how many of you today does being here represent a *change* to your schedule, or is this your routine?

What if something else came up on Sunday morning? What if Sunday morning *changed*? Would that change who was here? I know that it would have to be something pretty spectacular to get me to not be here—but that's because it's already fixed in my schedule.

Maybe this is a modern phenomenon. (And maybe it's not a phenomenon at all, but it's just me—that's possible too.) But I think that if Jesus showed up and was healing people, today, ...he might not get much of a crowd.

That's where our story of Jesus picks up this morning. Last week we heard about his baptism by John, then he called disciples and cast out a demon and started preaching and healing. He got so popular that he had to leave the area and preach elsewhere as he was called to do. Now, he's back home and everybody knows about it. There are huge crowds around the home he's staying at—our translation says "his home". They couldn't even use the front door, it was so crowded.

But, where did all these people come from? Didn't they have jobs? Didn't they have families to take care of? How is it even possible that they had the time to just get up and leave whatever else they had going on to go over and see this healing person?

Maybe this is a cultural difference between then and there and here and now. Or maybe it is just me.

But if Jesus *was* healing at some house somewhere in the city, I would really *want* to go...but I also have a lot going on.

Is it on a Thursday? Thursdays aren't good for me. I have a lot going on on Thursdays.

And what time is it? What time will the miraculous healings be taking place? And how long do they typically take? Because I do have a lot of other things going on. I wouldn't want it to be too late, because I need to get to sleep—the kids, you know. They wake up in the night. And it couldn't be too early, either, since I need to sleep as much as I can.

Is it far? I don't want to have to travel too far. Is Jesus hosting another healing session somewhere closer? Maybe on a Friday, late morning? I could probably make that work.

...Is this just me?

Perhaps the most miraculous thing about this story is that *all* these people were excited enough about something that they heard from other people that they were willing to drop everything else to go see for themselves.

I bet they weren't as busy as me. And that's probably true. They didn't have cell phones and data plans. They didn't have computers and devices that were supposed to make our lives so much easier but in reality just mean that we are supposed to be *doing* something every moment of every day.

What would it take for you—for any of us—to deviate from our plans? What about God working in our midst?

And I think that is exactly what we hear in this story and the mini-parables that are included at the end. Jesus is asking his hearers—and by extension, us—to recognize where we are and what's going on around us. Part of that is “living-in-the-moment”, a very trendy idea right now, but part of it is recognizing what is truly important.

After Jesus calls Levi, son of Alphaeus, to be his disciple, a group are eating at his house. The scribes of the Pharisees see that Jesus is eating with “tax collectors and sinners”. Jesus' response is that “those who are well have no need of a physician.” Later, when he is asked why his disciples don't fast as the Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples do, Jesus tells them a strange story about a bridegroom who leaves the wedding celebration. But both of these responses are about recognizing where you are and what's going on around you. If you are at a wedding feast, it is a time for celebration. Jesus, the messiah, is there in their midst. Why would they fast? The “sinners” want to hear what Jesus has to say—and why wouldn't they? They are the ones who most need to hear his message of repentance!

And speaking of sin, *that* is what Jesus fixes for the paralytic that is brought to him.

Last week we heard about the leper that Jesus reached out and *touched*—something you would never do. This man was unclean and quite possibly contagious! But Jesus touched him and brought him not only back to health, but back to a place of social acceptance.

Today, a man is paralyzed. But, despite the fact that he cannot walk, the biggest issue in his life is actually his sin—Jesus calls him and all of us to repent and be forgiven.

But, where am I getting that from? That is Jesus' first response when he sees the faith of this man's friends. He wasn't able to walk! He couldn't get to see Jesus. Even if he could walk, he couldn't even get to the front door! But this man is not suffering the same way that last week's leper was. This man has friends—really really good friends. Friends that will drop everything and go all the way across town carrying this man on a stretcher to bring him to a place of healing. And when they can't get him to Jesus, they don't give up, eager to get back to the busy schedule that they postponed to see about this healing. No, rather they go the extra mile, taking him up to the roof and tearing their way through the roof to lower him down to Jesus.

Is it any surprise that it is the faith of the friends that is recognized here? Because of *their* faith, Jesus says “your sins are forgiven.” This man already has a community and friends that care about him a lot. They are eager to make sacrifices to make his life better—we should all be so lucky as to have people like that in our lives.

He doesn’t need to be healed. He isn’t really suffering—not really.

But he is a sinner (as we all are). And Jesus forgives his sins.

And then, for the benefit of everyone *else* that is gathered there, but especially for those who are thinking in their heads that he is blaspheming as only God can forgive sins, for all of *them* Jesus tells the man to take up his mat and walk. And everyone gathered there realizes not only does this man have the power to make people well, but he *also* has the power to forgive sins.

And that is not all. Jesus is also trying to make this man realize what has happened—Jesus is giving him the gift of awareness. He is not simply healed—Jesus tells him *to pick up his mat and go home*. He will carry with him the memory of what has happened to him—of the life he lived before and of what others in his life were willing to do for him. And he will live a new life with a memory of the old life.

And it is the same awareness that Jesus is speaking of in his otherwise confusing mini-parables. You don’t sew an unshrunk piece of cloth on an old cloak or a worse tear is made. And you don’t put new wine in old wine skins or the skin will burst and the wine and the skin will be wasted.

It may be that these were common aphorisms of Jesus’ time. When we say “a penny saved is a penny earned,” or “the squeaky wheel gets the grease,” it might sound to Jesus like his aphorisms sound to us. Fabric was very different then, and much more expensive and laborious to make. If it ripped, you wouldn’t put it in the garbage like we might today with a ripped shirt or holes in our socks. You fixed it! And you knew enough to use similar fabric that would shrink at the same rate as the piece of clothing you put it on. And wine produces gas as it ferments (right, chemists?). New wine would require especially stretchy material (if it was a natural leather-type holder) to withstand the pressures while wine that was already fermented could be stored in less stretchy but still very useful vessels.

New fabrics don’t mix well with old fabrics. New wine doesn’t work well with old wine containers. Jesus is not giving fashion advice or helping us build our wine cellar. He is telling us to be aware of what is around us. Are we at a wedding feast? Then we should be partying. Do we have an old coat to fix? Make sure we choose fabric that will match.

More appropriate to our context, are we trying something new? Are we looking to repair a gaping hole that has been facing us for years? Are we trying to address a concern? If so, what methods are we using in our approach? Are we paying attention to what else is happening around us?

And, most important, are we aware that the messiah is with us, even now, in our midst? As we try new things and carry our mat with us as reminders of where we came from and how we were transformed, do we recognize that it is Jesus in our midst that is transforming us? Who is helping us to grow?

And the bridegroom is with us at the wedding feast, let us rejoice!