

Sunday July 25, 2021

Lesson 8: Love Your Neighbor, Really.

Scripture: Mark 2: 1-12

Context:

The final lesson for this section on loving our neighbors comes from the gospel of Mark. The focus of the lesson is to marvel at how invested true neighbors are to one another. We discover how Jesus calls us to respond in neighborly love and affection to those around us.

Our text begins in the seaside village of Capernaum, a place where Jesus begins his ministry and the home of the first place where he taught with authority per the account found in Mark's gospel. An interesting note in this text (at least in the NRSV version) is how Jesus is recorded as being "home," leading one to speculate Jesus had close ties to the city.

His arrival leads to a rumble as people gather to speak to him. The crowd is so large, a group of friends make the decision to lower their paralytic friend through the roof so Jesus might heal him. Jesus sees their faith and feels moved to speak to the paralytic.

There is a break at this point. The story moves from being about a miracle to a saying of the Lord, underscoring the forgiveness of sins as the main point.¹ Jesus says to the man, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" The sinfulness of the man seems to be the focus of Jesus, not necessarily the healing. Of course, it would be a mistake to assert from this case of how an illness (or paralysis) is the result of sin, for sin is nowhere mentioned in connection with any of the other healings and exorcisms in Mark.² Instead, Jesus is seen having the authority to do both. He forgives sins and he heals. He is the one who possesses the power to move forward in the kingdom of God.

The question of Jesus and his authority plays out in the rest of the narrative. There are legal experts who are concerned about what is taking place in front of them. They focus upon Jesus's words on forgiveness. The greater concern is how Jesus asserts himself as the forgiver of sins, not how he heals those who are paralyzed. This is blaspheming and the people begin to mutter about themselves.

Jesus takes it to the next level and calls them out, focusing upon the questions they ask among themselves. He then makes a point about why he says what he says. He makes the claim his title is the Human One (Son of Man in some translations), and then heals the man, telling him to pick up his mat and go home.

The results are the rejoicing of the people as the man gets up and walks out in front of everyone. The people begin to praise God as they've witnessed both a healing and one who speaks with authority about forgiveness. Our text reminds us of the power of God when it comes to God's forgiveness and the mission of Christ.

¹ Williamson, Lamar, Jr., "Mark," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 64.

² *Ibid.* 65.

Application

This rich text offers us many different possibilities to see how God is at work in our lives. As I read over this text, I thought of the times I have heard it taught or preached and I marvel how God can speak into different tenets of our lives at different times. As we reflect on this text, perhaps you might find one of the ways below or have your own reflection on how God is reaching out with a word to you; it is all good news.

Perhaps the one to stand out for some of us is the gift of faith in this text. While we do not know as much of the views of the paralytic, we read of how his friends truly believed in Jesus's healing powers and were so moved by him, they went to great lengths to have their friend healed. They give us hope for how faith can work in our lives. When by our actions we give evidence of our faith that Jesus has the authority to heal in whatever case it may be, miracles can still occur.³ Now the healing or event may not go quite like we might expect, and yet Jesus is still present and can sense our trust in him. The gift of faith reminds us of how Jesus's power is not limited by our inability to see the bigger picture. Jesus can take us to places we would never dare tread on our own.

The other major dominant theme in this text is forgiveness. Jesus is more focused on this concept as seen in his response to others. It is a twofold reminder. One, we are reminded of how Jesus is the Lord and Savior; he came so we might experience grace and healing. He came to forgive us and thus we should forgive others, as hard as it might be. When we forgive because Jesus has forgiven us, our faith is a faith that can be seen.⁴ Jesus shows us how forgiveness plays a central tenet in the Christian faith.

Secondly, Jesus shows how forgiveness can heal us and make us whole. One might wonder if Jesus wanted to make a point in healing this paralyzed man as everyone focused on his inability to move. With Jesus healing and forgiving him, followed by a chastising of some of the legal experts, God reveals to us how all can be forgiven because we all need forgiveness.

The text reminds us how we are called to be a forgiving people. When we accept the forgiveness of others, thereby recognizing our own sickness and incapacity, we are in that very act borne into the presence of God, who alone has the power to forgive and whose forgiveness alone ultimately matters.⁵ Jesus wants to remind us of how he is the one who is in charge. We are not the ones who get to play the role of judge and executioner. We cannot hold onto the sins of the past if we are to move forward into a new future.

We are called to be good neighbors, to invest in one another. The work is always rewarding, yet not always easy. This text shows us all the different players coming to the table with various concerns and hopes and dreams. Yet the one who stands in the center is Jesus, the one who heals each one of us and forgives us for when we are bad neighbors or poor disciples. He is the one who models for us, God in the flesh, of what it means to be a good neighbor and to love those in our community.

How do you hear God speaking to you in this text? Why do you think faith is so

³ Ibid., 66.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

important as a Christian? How does forgiveness from Jesus transform you? Who is God calling you to forgive? What does it mean to be an invested, good neighbor?

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