

(NIV) A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. **2** They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3** Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. **4** Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. **5** When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, **7** "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? **9** Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? **10** But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, **11** "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." **12** He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:1-12

"Does Jesus See Our Faith"

(RJ) Intro comments:

RJ: Good morning, partner and partners is ministry! I am so honored to be part of the Mission worship, sharing the word of God with my partner in ministry, Kendra! Kendra, can you introduce yourself to the members of our Conference?

Kendra: Thank you, RJ! I, too, am humbled and grateful to be part of this worship service. I am a Virginia Conference elder serving as Chaplain & Director of Church Relations at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland. Also I am completing my term as chairperson of the Conference Missional Ministries Board.

RJ: And I am Seungsoo Jun, the Associate Director of Serving Ministries, and of course, you can call me RJ. Initially, Bishop Carcano was supposed to come to share the Word of God at our conference, but unforeseen circumstances did not allow her to join us, and therefore we were appointed to share the word. We want to thank Bishop Lewis for entrusting us with such an important task. And also, thank her for asking us to do this as a team and not to bear the burden alone.

That is exactly what we need; each other. Starting in the role a year and a half ago during the pandemic would have never been possible without the partnership I had with Kendra as the Missional Ministries Board Chair, and I truly appreciate the work we were able to do as a team.

As we all know, ministry can not be done alone. We need each other to carry out the mission of God! In the same way, you will notice that Kendra and I are teaming up to share the message God has put into our hearts! And we want this time to share that heart with you in a more casual and relational way. To make it more relational, we did not robe, and we ask for your understanding.

However, that doesn't take away the message God put into our hearts. This is a time that we need to work together to serve the world!

(Kendra) *Context of Jesus' healings/prayer/crowds etc from Mark 1:32 ff*

Well, said, RJ! It's been a joy to be a part of your team! Why don't I get us started with a little context about the scripture reading.

- Today's reading is from the Gospel of Mark. It's the shortest one and it's very "to the point."
- It doesn't begin with a Christmas story, it just starts abruptly. By verse 14, Jesus' ministry is well underway.
- Already in the first chapter, Jesus has amazed so many people with his preaching, teaching, and healing, that anywhere he went, crowds formed. He couldn't move freely in a town or city, **v. 32 says that a whole town gathered at Jesus' door and they brought ALL who were sick.**
- so mostly he stayed far out in the country and people came to him. Until Mark Chapter 2...

(RJ) Capernaum

RJ: So we see in vs. 1, when it says, "A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home." Imagine the word spreading throughout the town of Capernaum. Did you hear? That Jesus came back to town. "Who are you talking about, the one who preached in the synagogue and drove out the impure spirit?" "the one who healed all the people at Simon's house?" The excitement to see what Jesus was doing and could do spread like wildfire, and people gathered to see Jesus.

Just like us gathered here! After the pandemic, we are here gathered to see each other and witness the work of the Holy Spirit during the time of the pandemic. Not only are we here to witness and testify to what happened, we are here to witness and confirm how God will continue to lead us in the future, especially in these uncertain times. Some of us might have gathered uncertainly, asking questions, just like the people who surrounded Jesus in this jam-packed house, but we are certain of one thing, as we read from the Bible, they must have returned with a heart-filled with hope for what God will do! Isn't that why we are here?

(Kendra) *Four Men carrying their friend*

Kendra: They must have been so excited, so eager to see Jesus, to hear him, to witness his power and experience his grace. But... what about the paralyzed man? There were no wheelchairs, no ramps for assistance. He would have heard about Jesus' presence, but I wonder if he ever expected to get to see Jesus, to meet Jesus face to face. (He might not have been able to even imagine)

I wish we knew more... did he ask his friends to help move him from his home to where Jesus was staying? Or, did his friends seek him out and offer to carry him? Oh, I wish we knew how that unfolded. But maybe the most important thing is not *who asked* or *who convinced* the others, or *how* it came to be... but the simple fact that these men *carried* their friend, they made it possible for him to meet Jesus. He could not have gotten there on his own. Their action is what made the difference.

My mother is at a point in her health and life journey where she cannot stand or walk without significant assistance. Even in 2022 with amazing medical advances and special equipment, it is a challenge to take her out for a dr's appointment or other outings. Both she and I worry that she will fall and break a bone, we struggle to get her in and out of a car... if mobility is a challenge for us today, how much more would it have been 2,000 years ago? Especially in such a dense, excited crowd? It would have been easier to apologize and tell their friend that it was just too much work, that they wouldn't be able to take him to see Jesus.

But that's not what happened. They committed themselves to action. So now I wonder, how did they carry him from his home to where Jesus was staying? Did they use the mat to carry him then or did they put their arms around his shoulders?

Do you know what I was tempted to do right now? (RJ: What?) I thought of bringing a large woven mat and getting you and me and maybe Kayana and John to each hold a corner... then ask for a volunteer from the floor to come forward and lie on the mat and see if we could carry them across the stage without dropping them.

That would be fun, wouldn't it? But maybe not so worshipful. But just imagining that scene gives us insight into what a major effort this was for the men to be sure that their friend got to meet Jesus... and didn't get hurt in the process. How did they do it?

Here's how the house where Jesus was staying might have looked (slide 1)...
pause... and the type of roof that was likely covering the house.

How did they do it?



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(RJ) What was their plan?

RJ: When I hear them, I hear someone more like me. Someone who doesn't have a plan and loves improvising! They just knew that somehow they needed to get their friend to Jesus. They were fixated on that thought. There might have been one who came up with that idea. 'Hey, I heard Jesus came back in town. We need to get our friend to Jesus! Jesus should be able to do something.' That person didn't know what that would entail but was able to get his friends to be part of this plan. In vs. 3 it says, Then some people^[a] came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. This means there were a group of people he was able to convince, and four of them were tasked to carry. Out of the group of people, there must have been planners who could improvise in the situation of having a great crowd that blocked them from the initial thought.

They must have come up with a plan to say, let's walk up that stair on the side and dig in the roof to lower our friend to Jesus. And we know that this brilliant plan can't come out of one person; it would have been a team effort!

As we know, 'teamwork makes the dream work!' They carried their friend up the stairs. They came up to the roof and laid their friend on the side. Some started digging the roof to make a hole to lower their friend, while others must have started finding rope or linen to tie around the cot in preparation for lowering. It must have been a group hustling and bustling in coordination and cooperation to pull this off.

(Kendra) "Jesus saw their faith" - Impressed by their faith Mark 2:5 (MSG)

That's got to be true! I'd just never thought about it that way:

This wasn't the work of one person or even just of four people, there had to be a lot of people working together, using their gifts and skills and insights and resources to make it possible!

Oh my, what we can learn from that?!... What we are putting into practice across our Conference, within our churches, in our home? ...hustling and bustling in coordination and cooperation...

When they lowered him through the roof, scripture says that “Jesus saw their faith.”

And Jesus responds not only with the physical healing they are seeking but with spiritual healing and forgiveness (That is not what we even what they asked for!) Yes, Jesus gives them abundantly more than they expected!

That’s what I usually focus on in this passage... but reading it together recently, what speaks to me most is the phrase: “Jesus saw their faith.”

In the Message version of scripture, it reads, “Jesus was impressed by their faith.”

I don’t get the sense though, that it was Jesus reading their minds or peering into their hearts, it is their extraordinary effort and action that He is responding to. This was not merely “thoughts and prayers” or “good intentions”... this was sweat and work and creativity and determination and love for their friend and risk taking and... and...

(RJ) But why did Jesus wait until they climbed up to the roof, dug through, and lowered him?

(dirt falling from ceiling, etc)

RJ: But Kendra, have you wondered why Jesus waited? Can you imagine? Even though it was a jam-packed room, there must have been some disturbance as the friends were trying to open up a hole? Debris falling from the ceiling, light starting to shine...

Although I know Jesus was the best preacher, and none of this would have distracted the people’s attention, he was capable of keeping on preaching while this was all happening. Unlike us, we need to keep asking people to focus on the message... ‘Eyes on us!’ (if the ceiling starts falling in here, I feel sure we’re going to lost them!)

Somehow, Jesus waited. He could have easily asked someone to go up to the roof and ask what was happening instead of asking the friends to stop destroying the property on

someone's roof and asking the group to make room for these friends to bring their friend to the center of the room. OR could have even parted the crowd and made a path, like God split open the Red Sea.

He didn't. Because he knew what was happening, and waited for his friend to complete their plans.

At home, I attend Woodlake United Methodist Church! They have a vision reminding all their members weekly, 'We are a roof-digging church.' It is to remind God's people that we will do everything in our might to bring people to Jesus.

My question is, would God be waiting for our Conference to remember that all of us are called to be a roof-digging team, and do you think Jesus is waiting for us to remember that call?

(Kendra) God works with us, in partnership with us, in connection with us

This is a sacred calling

How many of us stay in our comfortable homes, busy with our full schedules, or in our familiar pews and we feel concern about situations we read in about in the headlines... we are concerned about people whose paths we cross daily... but how many of us never DO anything? Are we willing to be roof-diggers?

The way this scripture unfolds, the physical and spiritual healing didn't occur until those around the paralyzed man came together to work for his healing. I read this as a message to the Church today, especially during stressful, divisive times:

Jesus is not only calling us to believe, but Jesus is calling us to action, to work together, to shared mission in order to bring healing to our broken world.

The witness of the four men carrying the mat no doubt inspired folks standing still to move out of the way. As you said earlier, RJ, maybe they inspired other people to find a piece of rope to help lower him down when it was time... and others to get busy digging

the hole in the roof or to go find a tool needed to do that work or to bring a jug of water to support those doing the hard labor.. All sorts of gifts and resources were needed!

As more people got involved, more lives were affected, more people became connected to what happened. They all cared *and* they all took action *and* they all witnessed first-hand the extraordinary power of Jesus.

(RJ) The challenge to the Conference Coordination and Conviction

We want to challenge our conference to remember that we need Coordination and Conviction to carry out the mission of God together.

- *Coordination (RJ)*

RJ: There is an African Proverb that I think is appropriate for us to remember. “if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together” - African

Proverbs. I’m a person who likes going fast. Once I get an idea, I like to see it happening. However, I also know that I cannot do it alone, nor my plans can ever be perfect. Like the friend who had a great idea to take his friend to Jesus but didn’t have plans to overcome all the obstacles on the way to see the idea become a reality, I know that no one can carry out God’s mission alone.

Sometimes, coordination takes time. More importantly, it takes patience. It takes time for us to understand that we bring different gifts to the table. It takes time to understand that teamwork needs time to develop. Remember the friends carrying their friends up the roof. Remember how they needed a lot of communication while lowering their friend down the roof. That happens with a lot of teamwork and communication.

Maybe Jesus is waiting for us to remember that we need to somewhat rebuild that sense of teamwork as we come out of this pandemic to sail through the sea of uncertainty.

- *Conviction - (Kendra)*

Yes, we need that Coordination, and we need CONVICTION...

Carry this story of the man forgiven and healed of paralysis with you. Not only to remember Jesus' miracle but the fact that this miracle occurred because of the effort the man's friends and also the bystanders in the crowd once they saw the opportunity to help.

We knew how that story was going to end because it's printed in our Bible... but they had no idea as they were living it. They could have gone to all that effort and never gotten enough to Jesus to get his attention. Right? It was a HUGE crowd and everyone wanted to get to Jesus! But they were determined to give it their all and they believed that Jesus could heal, could do ANYTHING!

The church today must remember how important CONVICTION is. Do we believe that God is active in our world today? Do we believe that God has the power to heal, to restore, to make new? If we have faith and conviction that God can do these things, then our actions must match our words. And friends, our actions and witness just might inspire those standing near us to hope, to believe, to join the effort, to see first-hand the powerful work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus saw the faith of the friends carrying their friend on the mat...

Does Jesus see our faith?

Practical examples? (RJ and Kendra each share)

RJ: When I reflect on Coordination and Conviction, I see how we, as an annual conference, respond to any type of crisis. Refugee, Disaster. All people from different backgrounds come together with a conviction of heart to be part of God's mission.

Kendra: Absolutely! I think of our United Methodist connection too. My thoughts go to Mission Trips and when I see trips promoted as UMVIM sponsored then I can trust that not only the details of the trip (safety, efficiency) are in place but also the conviction that it's not a "tourist trip" but there is respect of local resources and context... people sharing their gifts and resources with clear conviction that we are all God's children, all in this together, and eager to work together for the good of all creation. Our United Methodist Connection encourages our Coordination and Conviction!

RJ: Serving Heart Pin

Closing words/re-state the challenge (Kendra)

- So... Coordination and Conviction... do we believe God is at work in our world, are we partnering with those around us to be a part of this Kingdom work?
- And do we have a heart for mission, is our personal witness one of Conviction that we live out daily? That our congregations are living out too?
- The crowd long ago saw the faith of the man on the mat and his friends... and they were inspired to get involved. What do bystanders see in us?
- What does Jesus see when He looks at us?

Prayer (RJ)