

**“Some People”**

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Lent, Sunday, April 3, 2022

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**Scriptures            Matthew 9: 1-13**

<sup>1</sup> And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town.

<sup>2</sup> And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

<sup>3</sup> Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” <sup>4</sup> But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? <sup>6</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” —he then said to the paralytic— “Stand up, take your bed, and go to your home.”

<sup>7</sup> And he stood up and went to his home. <sup>8</sup> When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

<sup>10</sup> And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup> But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

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Worship Theme

*O Christ, the healer, we have come  
to pray for health, to plead for friends.  
How can we fail to be restored,  
when reached by love that never ends?*

*Grant that we all, made one in faith,  
in your community may find  
the wholeness that, enriching us,  
shall reach the whole of humankind. --Fred Pratt Green, 1967*

Sermon

We are thrilled to be able to return on Easter Sunday morning  
to hosting a spectacular Easter egg hunt,

arts and crafts for children,  
and some goats on leashes on the church lawn.  
Goats on the lawn are one way to save on lawnmowing fees.

A few short years back Haley, the granddaughter of Steve Teague, participated.  
Steve told me afterward about her brain tumor,  
which makes her waddle when she walks.  
She gathered with the toddlers and preschoolers.  
The plastic eggs had been spread in a small area so they would be easy to collect.  
Someone said, "*Ready, set, go!*"  
and the boys and girls started to pick up the brightly colored eggs.  
Haley moved forward, clutching her Easter basket,  
her sights set on a large orange egg about ten feet away.  
She walked right past several eggs,  
waddling forward with great determination.  
When Haley reached the large orange egg,  
she stooped down, picked it up,  
and then very carefully placed it in the basket of another child.

The faith of friends has the power to save.

### ***Some People***

*And just then some people  
were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed.  
When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,  
"Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." --Matthew 9: 2*

### ***Some People***

Some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed.

Those are some people.  
Those are some friends.

Helen Keller is known to have said,  
*"I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light."*

This beloved story in the Bible is so memorable  
because it speaks to our hearts  
about the faith of friends and the divine power of friendship.

The tale of friends bringing their friend to meet God  
appears in Mark, Matthew and Luke.

Mark, for whom urgency and immediacy are critical,  
places it near the beginning of the Gospel in the second chapter.

Listen for the Word of God,  
hear the same story as in Matthew, whose version is quite brief,  
as told by Mark in a more expanded version:

*When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days,  
it was reported that he was at home.  
So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them,  
not even in front of the door...  
[Jesus] was speaking the word to them.*

*Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man,  
carried by four of them.*

*And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd,  
they removed the roof above him;  
and after having dug through it,  
they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.*

*When Jesus saw their faith,  
he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." –Mark 2: 1-5*

### ***Some People***

Hold on a minute.  
Whose faith got pointed out?  
Whose faith saved another's soul?  
Whose faith had the power to heal and release, set free and transform?

Some friends' faith.  
Friends who carried a companion through the streets to meet God.  
Friends who refused to let any physical obstacles  
or objections by neighbors who said, "I was here first; take a number!"  
or an overflowing house halt or hinder their singular objective:  
to bring their friend to God.

Friends who overcame the social stigma of touching and giving care  
to their beloved friend who happened to be paralyzed.  
Common understanding and teaching  
was that the root cause of disease and brokenness was sin.

If something was amiss, off kilter with your body or mind or spirit,

surely it must be because of sinfulness.

The word “sin” is Latin for “without”.

To sin is to be without a connection with God, without one another, without yourself.

To sin is to be intentionally separated from God,  
intentionally separated from one another,  
intentionally separated from your true self.

To sin is to be in need of God’s forgiving grace.

To get a fresh start, a clean beginning, a clean slate.

To be forgiven of our sins to so be renewed.

Saved.

Delivered.

Liberated from whatever made us feel or think or act like we were without God.

That we were sinners.

That we need a friend to pray for us, to forgive us, to bring us to God.

That we need, crave intercessory prayer.

Roberta Bondi shares that:

*“One of the aims of prayer is to grow in friendship with God.*

*If this is the case, then let’s consider what constitutes a friendship,  
and then try to pray in accordance with that.*

*One of the things about friends is that they want the same thing for each other.*

*Not that they necessarily both want ice cream at the same time,  
but that the well-being of one person is tied to the well-being of the other.*

*This doesn’t just mean that God wants what we want,  
but that we want what God wants out of friendship for God.*

*That is a basis for intercessory prayer.*

*If God’s deepest longing is for the well-being of the world,  
then God wants the well-being of Bosnia [for example, or the Ukraine],  
and we pray for that out of friendship with God.*

—Roberta Bondi, “Learning to Pray: An Interview with Roberta Bondi,” The Christian Century 113, no. 10 (March 20–27, 1996): 327.

### **Some People**

The Good News is that Jesus welcomes sinners, like me, like maybe you as well,  
feeds us, tells us we belong, forgives us,  
and tells us to rise, get up and move on!

When Jesus saw that faith of the friends,  
*he said to the paralytic,*  
*“Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

*Jesus said to the paralytic, "I say to you, stand up, take your mat  
and go to your home."*

*And he stood up,  
and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them;  
so that they [- the community --]  
were all amazed and glorified God, saying,  
"We have never seen anything like this!"*

Some people are amazed!  
Wow! Fantastic! ...what just happened?!

What happened is that Jesus suddenly expands our theological appreciation  
of who has the power to forgive, to heal, the help.

Some people will tell you that only God can forgive.  
Some might say that forgiveness falls solely under the authority and prerogative of God.  
Some might say otherwise,  
bearing witness that Jesus Christ forever widened  
the breadth and depth of our communal grasp  
of mercy, of grace, of compassion.

Here Jesus teaches and exemplifies  
that not only does the Messiah have the power to forgive,  
so too does the whole people of God.

Some people might tell you that healing happens in community.  
Spiritual healing is a communal experience.  
So, too, is physical and emotional healing.  
We need one another,  
and when we meet each other in that need with God's forgiving grace,  
some people will exclaim,  
*"Wow! We have never seen anything like this! Let's see some more!"*

### ***Some People***

The faith of your friends can save you.  
When you feel weak or falter,  
when doubt or fear predominate, when life paralyzes you,  
when your mind or body or soul feel broken, fragmented, torn asunder,  
the faith of your friends can save you.

In the same vein, your faith can save your friends.

You have this power, this love, this gift of God.

The Word in Galatians 6 testifies,

*“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians,

*“Nevertheless, God, who comforts those who are cast down,  
comforted us by the coming of Titus.”*

God chooses to comfort us, to care for us, to heal and redeem us  
through the TLC of our friends.

Our friends know us, and they know our needs.

In the same vein, we know what our friends need, as well.

And if we don’t, we are bound and determined to find out!

Here in the south we often say, *“Love is blind, but the neighbors aren’t.”*

Trust God to work in and through those whom you trust,  
those whom others trust,  
those who have your best interest at heart.

God’s love is made incarnate through friends who forgive,  
who forget trespasses,  
who encourage and empower and engage you and you and you.

Would you agree that we see the face of God in friends  
who serve as caregivers and wounded healers, advocates and allies.

Whose friendship saved you, exemplifies God’s forgiving grace?

Who gave you such a life-saving gift?

Who in your circle of friends needs to be forgiven?

To whom is God calling you to extend mercy?

### ***Some People***

[“THE ONION” From *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky]

*“Once upon a time there was a woman,  
wicked as wicked could be,  
and she died.*

*And not one good deed was left behind her.*

*The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire.*

*Her guardian angel stood thinking:  
What good deed of hers can I remember to tell God?*

*Then he remembered and said to God:  
Once she pulled up an onion and gave it to a [hungry neighbor].*

*God answered:  
Take now that same onion, hold it out to her in the lake,  
let her take hold of it and pull,  
and if you pull her out of the lake,  
she can come into paradise.*

*The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her:  
Here, he said, take hold of it and I'll pull.*

*And he began pulling carefully,  
and had almost pulled her all of the way out,  
when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out  
and all began holding on to her so as to be pulled out with her.*

*But the woman was wicked as wicked could be.*

*She began to kick them with her feet:  
'It's me who's getting pulled out, not you; it's my onion, not yours.'*

*No sooner did she say it than the onion broke.  
And the woman fell back into the lake.*

*...the angel wept and went away."*

*The onion, representing her singular act of mercy,  
was strong enough to save her  
and all her neighbors, together,  
yet not enough to save only her.*

*Imagine how her life might have changed and evolved and blossomed  
if she'd had a little friend named Haley,  
waddling over to place her gifts in other people's baskets.*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*