

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES*Karl A. McKinney***MARK 2:1-12****RETELLING THE STORY**

On that day beside the lake inside the jam-packed house, Jesus began the work God had given him. No work in creation is more important than the restoration of creation to its Creator.

And so, the door to the house was open as people arrived. The guests did not socially distance themselves. No one at the door was managing the press of the crowd; no one was allowing and disallowing people. Jesus taught about the kingdom, explained his actions, healed the sick, delivered his neighbors from evil spirits. There must have been something exciting about all that happened.

Four men arrived and wanted to get near to Jesus. They were carrying a man on a pallet, and entry was prevented by the tightly packed crowd inside and outside the house. Desperate, the four men forced their way into Jesus's presence. They went up to the roof and tore a hole in it, then lowered their friend down in front of Jesus. Lying there, he could look through the skylight and look into the face of Jesus. He could see those in the crowd within his lines of sight.

This was one of those unusual occasions when someone who was desperate to contact Jesus went to extraordinary lengths, with success! The last act of these men to get their friend before Jesus made them liable for the repairs of someone else's house. These four friends loved their friend that much, and they trusted Jesus that much, and by faith with hope they became indebted to the homeowner as they sought compassion and healing for their friend.

It turns out the whole crowd needed a lesson about healing! The crowd thought they knew the healings they needed, and they were right, but they needed more healing than they understood. The five men had drawn the attention of everyone in the house upward, as they created a skylight in the roof, then descended into the house, laid their friend in front of Jesus, thereby setting the stage and silencing everyone so that Jesus could give everyone a lesson in healing.

Jesus's lesson had several parts to it. The major point was that the Son of Man had authority on earth to forgive sins—as in, along with the power to heal, the Son of Man had authority on earth to forgive sins. What provoked this lesson? The arrival of the five men, one of them paralyzed and loved and carried by his friends; but also, the skepticism kept in reserve by everyone who'd come to learn and be healed; but also, the limited expectation of everyone to have their temporary expectations and demands for healing fulfilled so they would be on their way back into their *normal lives*.

For the crowd, healing from Jesus would go no further than repairing them and sending them on their way. Everyone in the crowd subconsciously believed something like this: *Jesus can heal physical ailments, but I will—all of us will—walk out of this house still bearing the weight of our sins; there is no forgiveness on earth for us nor between us. God cannot heal everything!*

Jesus unveiled this paralysis that absorbed and crippled every person in the house and in the world.

It turns out the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were the temple's *Guards of Sin Retention*. They felt compelled to defend the *common sense* regarding the forgiveness of sins: only God forgives sins; we mediate the forgiveness of sins; we tell people what can be forgiven at what price and what sins cannot be forgiven at what price; and "*my people love to have it so*" (Jeremiah 5:31). Forgiveness had become unusual, rare, exceptional, uncommon. Even Jubilee did not happen, if it ever had happened more than once, in Israel's history. Part of the malaise of sickness, illness, depression, and all sort of deformities was the result of the lack of forgiveness between neighbors.

Jesus did not rest but gave rest to the souls of his people—the forgiveness of sins, along with healing for every part of their being.

BROKEN ROOF VERSUS A NEW HEALING PARADIGM

Which is more important to you: the houses where you live and where you meet or the one whom you follow? List a few implications of this in your relationships with your neighbors today.

The last act of these men to get their friend before Jesus made them liable for the repairs of someone else's house. These four friends loved their friend that much, and they trusted Jesus that much, and by faith with hope, they became indebted to the homeowner as they sought Jesus to exercise his authority in the life of their friend.

Reflect together on what your congregation can learn about exercising authority on behalf of your neighbors and for their benefit because of your relationship with Jesus.

THE AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS AND TO HEAL

Maybe your congregation has had experiences with forgiving sins and pursuing one another's healing that are similar to those of most Christian congregations. Maybe your congregation does not prioritize exercising its authority to forgive sins and pursue one another's healing.

When I was a child, people who followed Jesus said this a lot, “Eleven o’clock is the most segregated hour of the week” (in the US and I’m told in all of North America). The sins of separatism, division, racism, white supremacy, and segregation in the body of Christ have been protected by our refusal to confess them and forgive them repeatedly, for centuries.

The use of “common sense” helped to develop this situation in the Church. We made segregation more important than being the body of Christ. On one hand, we learned about forgiving one another so that God also would forgive us. On the other hand, BIPOC Christians and White Christians do not work at confessing sins and forgiving sins at all, at any time. As a result, we are not convinced on either side that we have authority on earth to forgive sins and to pursue one another’s healing. The sins and the damages have become larger in our minds, having convinced us that healing is impossible and forgiveness is useless. *Following common sense is so powerful!*

Perhaps we even believe the situation we have created cannot be healed and cannot be forgiven. Jesus confronted this large hindrance and obstacle in the house where he stayed (Mark 2:6-11). Even as massive crowds were exercising faith in God, the religious leaders stoked unbelief, but Jesus did not allow the status quo to prevail.

Today, experiences with forgiveness of sins and healings await us in the Church and in all of creation, experiences we have never had before.

- » Why did Jesus ask his neighbors to explain “which is easier,” to forgive sins or to heal someone?
- » Why did Jesus then demonstrate there is no difference between forgiving sins and healing a human being’s life?
- » Who else has the authority to do either?

When we ask God to lead us to exercise the authority God gives to us, we are faced with a host of oppositions that line up right next to the opportunity to respond to God by preparing for action. Agree to follow up on each of the following with one another in the weeks ahead. We have to give *forgiveness of sins* its priority in our life and in our life together in Christ.

- » Are you and is your congregation predisposed to offer forgiveness of sins to one another and to neighbors?
- » Or are you predisposed to demanding perfection from one another and from neighbors?

Even though Christianity has not prioritized exercising our authority, individual followers of Jesus and congregations can take steps to patiently navigate the movement from disobedience into obedience to Jesus.

The first step is to seek God for forgiveness and healing, and having received forgiveness, to share forgiveness with one another. When God forgives us, God expects us to exercise the authority to give and to receive forgiveness to and from one another.

God forgives us when we ask God to forgive us, and God authorizes us—and requires us—to forgive one another (Matthew 6:12, 14). Jesus said God sets conditions for us to continue to receive forgiveness from God; specifically, we must also forgive one another’s sins.

Our next step is to disentangle ourselves from ideas and common sense that we should not forgive one another nor seek another’s forgiveness. Consider these steps that facilitate exercising our authority to forgive sins and to heal one another:

- Seek to understand Jesus’s authority to forgive sins. Explore the authority Jesus gave to us to forgive sins.
- Work together at displacing the common patterns and common sense of our world with the priority to forgive one another’s sins and seek one another’s healing and restoration.
- Discover through forgiving and through seeking forgiveness the effect and power of forgiving one another as you forgive family, friends, the body of Christ, and neighbors
- Explore how to pursue healing and forgiveness around past injustices and wickedness in your life, family, in your tradition and congregation, and our society.
- Listen for the Holy Spirit to guide you to actions you can take, gifts to share, and how to connect with neighbors who are oppressed by sin and evil spirits. Clarify actions you feel compelled to take as you pray. Assess your preparedness to reorganize your time to *continue listening for God to speak* and to *continue watching for opportunities to act*.
- Begin to discuss with each other changes your congregation could make in the use of its space(s), budget, staffing, and program priorities, with a focus on the healing of neighbors and on forgiveness of sins.
- Begin to identify ways you can make your life and your home more welcoming and inviting to your neighbors.

When we seek God for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit calls us to engage the difficult work of forgiving and seeking forgiveness with one another. Forgiveness empowers us to forgive another—to pay it forward—to experience healing and to pursue one another’s healing. Then we too will be amazed and glorify God (Mark 2:12)!

A PRAYER

Lord,

We have cooperated with our ancestors and destroyed the communion and fellowship of the saints. We have followed lusts and evil desires; we have helped to build oppressive systems that were designed to advantage white people while exploiting, exterminating, and in many other ways disadvantaging the poor, strangers, women, children, and people of color. We have sinned in these and in many other ways.

Lord, we have cooperated with our ancestors, but not with Holy Spirit to constantly forgive the sins of one another and pursue one another's healing. We believe there are sins that cannot be forgiven; we believe there are illnesses that cannot be healed.

We do not remember that forgiveness and healing are your gifts to restore humanity and all creation. Please restore our memory, teach us what we do not know and give us experiences we have not had for centuries.

We renounce efforts to work superficially; keep us from the temptation to avoid paying the price to follow you.

We admit our need for you to remind us who we are; we ask you to forgive our sins against you, as well as our devotion to white supremacy, racist structures, greed, pleasing people, and hatred of one another.

Please forgive us.

Please teach us how to dismantle white supremacy and racist structures with our children and openly before our watching world, with all the saints.

Please return us to the communion of the saints with one another.

In Jesus' name. Amen.