



A REFLECTION ON THE SEARCH FOR HEALING

Outside the Walls And Through the Roof

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The story of the paralyzed man lowered through the roof to receive Jesus' healing appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but the best details are in Luke's version. The miracle of note, of course, occurs at the moment when Jesus has the man rise, pick up his stretcher and go home.

The dramatic tension, however, is in the narrative before and after the miracle. Jesus had become so popular and his reputation as a healer so powerful that crowds surrounded him most of the time. When the four friends of a paralyzed man couldn't carry him on his pallet anywhere near Jesus, they got creative. Hauling the pallet up to the roof of the house in which Jesus was teaching, they ripped a hole in the roof and lowered the pallet through it, plopping the paralyzed man at the feet of the only person who could effect a miraculous cure.

Who are the characters in the scene? Jesus, the protagonist, is immersed in teaching and healing. The Pharisees are the antagonists, hoping to catch him up in legalistic interpretations of his words and deeds. The supporting characters, important to the dynamic of the story, are the paralyzed man and the four friends who carried him to Jesus.

In Matthew and Mark's versions of this story, Jesus acknowledges the faith of the man and his four friends, then says to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you." It is only in Luke's version that Jesus offers forgiveness to the group: Their sins are forgiven.

What sins would those be? Perhaps it was presuming on the priorities of a busy Messiah. Or barging into someone's house after trashing their roof, in a New Testament example of how the end seems to justify the means. Or maybe managing

to get someone who needed healing to the one person who could heal him, acknowledge them, forgive them, restore them.

The Pharisees, who also could benefit from some forgiveness, take issue with the idea of it being offered by an interloper like Jesus to the five sinners in pursuit of healing. Jesus chides them, telling them that the Son of Man does indeed have authority on earth to forgive sins.

Outside the walls and through the roof have literal and metaphorical meanings. Taking health care outside the walls of hospitals, clinics and physician offices is a reference to the many opportunities for care and healing that occur in church basements, community centers and new partnerships. It also is an invitation to consider the elements and agents of healing beyond the expectations of the health care industry. Surely the four friends were agents of the paralyzed man's healing. Surely the territorial instincts of the Pharisees were not.

Jesus used miracles, parables and the example of his own ministry to teach us that healing is open to anyone who calls on him, that it occurs on the street, after the meeting, in the office and at the bedside, and that creative disruptions — through the roof, over the transom and outside the walls — may be innovative routes to encounter the healing presence of the Son of Man.

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