

## "Friends and friendship" Matthew 9:1-8 Trinity 19 2023

Many years ago, there was a man who wanted to meet Jesus. Everyone in that day wanted to meet Jesus. This man hoped Jesus would heal him. There was a problem. He could not walk. Even more, there were too many people blocking the way to Jesus. How would he get to there?

The local government was unwilling to help. They did not care about the little guy. The military wasn't interested. They were too busy keeping the Roman peace. The bankers knew there was no money in it. The religious leaders saw him as a sinner and were unwilling to lift a finger. The man needed someone to get him to Jesus. He needed a friend.

It has been said, "A friend is one who steps in when the whole world steps out!" Or to say it another way, "An old friend will help you move, a good friend will help you move a dead body." This man was as good as dead. He needed four good friends to move him. That is exactly what happens. Listen to verse 2ff:

Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven."

At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, "He's blaspheming!"

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Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, “**Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts? For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**” —then he told the paralytic, “**Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.**”

Notice the first verse, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘**Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.**’” Jesus forgave the man because of his friends’ faith. Jesus saw the love they had for the man. He saw the love it took to hoist him up and lower him through the roof. It required a ladder, rope, ingenuity, sweat, and a whole lot of love. Jesus saw their faith and forgave the man on the spot. That is friendship!

In life we have many vocations. We have the vocation of work. We have the vocation of family. We have the vocation of being a neighbor. But one of our greatest vocations is friendship. Moses had Aaron to lift his arms. Naomi had Ruth. Paul had Timothy. Lewis had Clark. Rachel had Monica, Chandler, Joey, Phoebe, and Ross.

Who are your friends? Who can you rely on? Who relies on you? Who will hold up your arms when you cannot? And whose arms will you hold up? Who are you bringing to Jesus?

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The paralytic needed friends to get him to Jesus. He had them! The story should end here. All should be fine. But it is not. Listen to verse 3: At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, "He's blaspheming!"

Do you remember where the religious leaders are at? That's right, they are in the house with Jesus. They were the reason why the paralytic couldn't get to Jesus in the first place. They blocked the way. No wonder Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs (clean on the outside and dead on the inside). They did not have the mind of Christ. They trusted their own right-ness instead of God's righteousness. They were the kind of people Paul talked about in Philippians 2, when he said: "all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). Their faith was in themselves. Don't ever place your trust in yourself. You will always let yourself down.

There is only one person you can trust; one person who is your friend, namely, Jesus. As verse 4ff explains:

Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, "**Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts? For which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then he told the paralytic, "**Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.**" So he got up and went

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home. When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.

Jesus is your friend. Jesus forgives you, heals you and dies for you. **"No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends."** (John 15:3). If you don't know that Jesus is your friend, I plead with you to get to know him.

As the old hymn says:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In his arms he'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.

There really is no better friend than Jesus!

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I want to end with this question: what did these friends do after the man was healed? No longer did his friends need to carry him. So what did they do? I imagine they ran and danced all the way home. And what did they do with the pallet? They probably used it for a bonfire and partied the night away. Why? Because that is what friends do!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, thank you for being my friend and letting me be your friend. Thank you for letting me bring you to Christ. And thank you for bringing others to Jesus. May you continue to love each other as you run, dance, and celebrate the life you have in Christ! And never forget, Jesus is the truest friend, the one who gave up his life for you!

Amen!