

## THE CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

Creative Caring

Luke 5:17-26

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-church-without-walls-creative-caring/>

In our text, some friends bring a paralyzed man to Jesus for healing. When they can't get through due to the crowd, they tear off the roof and lower him into Jesus' presence! Note that Jesus forgives the man's sins and heals his affliction. Jesus is interested in the total person (just as our preferred future statement indicates). But surprisingly, Jesus forgives the man's sins before he heals the man of his physical need. And he forgave the man without being asked to do so! Isn't that just like Jesus—doing more than we ask, before we ask!

We all stand in need of God's forgiveness through Christ. We've been having loads of fun here at the church office, dealing with some changeover of our files to the cloud. My computer was glitching and on Thursday, the tech said, "I'm going to see if I can give it a deep scrub and fix it." Wow. That's God in Christ. He gives us a deep scrub.

But there is a group present in this story who didn't agree. They thought rules and traditions were more important than people. The Pharisees and religious teachers were the ones sitting, policing Jesus, in the way, taking up space! And like the Pharisees, we can be pious, earnest, sincere, thoughtful, but miss the point—and be in the way!

But contrast this privileged class of church folk with the men who carried the lame man. What words would we use to describe how they accomplished their mission that day? Let's try these: COOPERATION. Please note in v. 20. It was not the paralyzed man's faith. It was the faith of his carriers! Now, catch this vision of community transformation. Every person does her or his part. I heard a speaker at Baptist World Alliance. He has worked to abolish human trafficking in New Zealand. He said we each do our part, like pieces of a puzzle. You do the dishes, someone else works on policy, another person is an attorney, while someone else wins that person to Christ. It's all Kingdom work! Cooperation!

INNOVATION. These men carrying the pallet. What was their goal? To maintain decorum? To be sure no traditions were broken? To keep as many people as possible happy? No. Their goal was to help their friend to wholeness. So once the goal was clear, innovation led the way.

At the beginning of WWII in Europe, in 1940, traditionalists were still arguing for the superiority of horses in battle, instead of upgrading to armored forces. Even after the Polish were overrun in a matter of minutes by Nazi panzers, a journal of the time argued that it was a mistake to depend on motorized and mechanical transportation. "The idea of huge armies rolling along roads at a fast pace is a dream." They went on to add how much easier it is to care for horses than tanks [*No Ordinary Time*, by Doris Kearns Goodwin, p. 51].

What are the horses that we are hanging on to, which need to be given up, in order to reach people? What housetops do we need to dismantle in order to see community transformation?

And as Graham Williams keeps saying in our meetings, “Don’t limit God!” Translated: Tear up that roof!

**HARD WORK.** Do you think these men carrying Jesus had it easy? Have you ever carried another adult, in dead weight? Not to mention, to carry him up on a roof. And don’t you imagine there were other things these men had to do that day, which they gave up, in order to help? Perhaps this is the one thing we have not talked about enough. Implementing our plans, and truly setting sail is going to require everyone, and going to require lots of hard work.

You know, actual ministry situations are never as neat and tidy as we imagine them, sitting here in church on Sunday. Real life is complex, difficult. Pope Francis has said, “People tire us because they ask concrete things of us” and we feel that urgency of here and now, real life [*The Great Reformer*, by Austen Iverleigh, p. 141].

And who else but Christ’ church can address both these concrete needs and eternal needs? Jesus is the center of all we do in community transformation. It’s because of the way he cared, changed people, loved, healed and blessed others. And the way he died and returned alive. Yes, it’s all because of Jesus. So just one question remains. Am I in the way or leading the way for others?