

Mark 2:1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof about Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . ." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

"The Forgiveness of Jesus"

When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic,

"Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:5

I met my first paralyzed man during a physical therapy internship in undergraduate school. His name was Sam. He was twenty-two, a straight A college student, touch down jock, and paralyzed from the neck down. His surfing accident had happened a few days before. It was his fault. He misjudged the wave. He didn't know the depth of the surf. In the aftermath of his accident an overwhelming number of negative forces ganged up against him as the waves of shocking reality rolled in. The powers pounded him. Rage over his powerlessness to undo what was done ripped him apart. Over and over he beat himself up with, "You stupid, careless, good for nothing, incompetent fool." Fear froze him. The image of a baby dumped in the trash became his only night time dream. The grief of irretrievable loss sank him into deep depression. Hopelessness shut him down when he learned that there were no restorative medical options open to him. With no light at the end of the tunnel for physical rehabilitation his spirit died to the larger purposes for which it had previously lived. The powers of defeat were many but the most

formidable force of all was absolute helplessness. No matter how hard he wished or willed his body arms, back, torso, abs, legs and feet into action, they didn't move. The disconnect between thoughts and bodily response stripped him of all meaning to his embodiment. The paralysis played havoc with Sam's body knowledge. It also threw his developing identity and sense of self into crisis. When he lost his athletic ability he lost his daily connection with his mentor and coach. When he lost his fame he lost his main connection with his father. When he lost his strength to stand up for himself he lost his prized connection with his mother. And, when he fell into absolute helplessness he fell off his own ego pedestal. Everyone whom he had looked up to and relied upon for his personal growth and identity development were no longer unavailable to him. Only fragmented and disconnected images, feelings and thoughts of himself filled his swarming head. They turned him inward and downward against himself.

When I remember Sam, I also remember what it was like to be his physical therapist and totally helpless to fix the neurological disconnect to his muscles. There were no braces, exercises, whirlpools, ultrasounds, electronic assistance devices, or electrical stimulation treatments that I could pull from my healing bag of tricks that could mend the break. I also remember what it was like to be totally helpless in my attempts to mend his fragmented sense of self. I was of no help to him. He hated to see me coming. His total dependency upon me caused him to despise me.

He rejected my words of empathy and encouragement. Silenced by the wall he put up and weighed down by his arms and legs as I carried them through a full range of passive exercises, a childhood nursery rhyme daily mocked my helping ability. *Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall.*

• *Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again.*

In my post traumatic work with Sam, it was the wisdom story, The Map, that helped me to understand that the core piece of work essential to Sam's rehab was the restoration of his sense of self. *Once a father was looking after his children and trying to keep them entertained, but he wasn't having too much success. It was a wet Saturday, and the children were getting bored. They were starting to get on his nerves, with their restlessness and their constant chattering. But the man was inventive, and suddenly he had an idea. He took down a magazine from the shelf and opened it up, looking through it until he found a map of the world printed on one page. He tore this page out of the magazine, and proceeded to cut it up with scissors into small pieces. Then he jumbled up all the pieces and placed them in a pile on the floor, like the pieces of a jigsaw. Then he set his two young sons the task of putting the map together again, thinking that this would keep them quiet for a good long time. He left them with it and went off to make himself a cup of coffee. Imagine his amazement, therefore, then five minutes later he came back to find the map neatly and accurately put back together again. 'How did you*

manage to put it back together again so quickly?' he asked them, taken aback by their skill. 'Oh, it was easy,' the younger boy replied. 'You told us it was a map of the world, and when we looked at the pieces, at first we didn't know where to begin to sort it all out. It seemed impossible. But then we realized that there was a picture of a man on the other side, so we put the man back together again. When we turned it over, the world had come back together again as well!' 'Yes, Dad,' chimed in the other brother. 'It's ever so easy. If you put the man right the world is OK.' (source unknown 100 Wisdom Stories Margaret Silf)

No question about it, putting the personal puzzle pieces of Sam back right was the identity and self esteem work that needed to be done. But how? Psychologists tell us that there is something that happens within us whenever we can't fix a problem. That something is called a dependency crisis. We know the crisis is upon us when we start asking the two critical questions: What can help me? Who can help me? A dependency crisis is a normal occurrence in our daily lives that we usually resolve with little effort and attention. Most of the time we resolve the problem by fixing whatever needs fixing ourselves. Sometimes somebody else helps out. Other times a situation happens that nobody can fix. Pastoral theologians tell us that when this happens, another kind of crisis occurs. This kind is called a crisis of faith. What this means is that we start wondering if there is a God (higher power) who can help. And, if there is, what God will do to help.

In the Bible, the psalms connect us with the prayers of our forebears in faith who believed that there was a God who could and would help. I lift my eyes to the hills, from whence does my help come, my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Throughout the Old Testament we also find Hebrew thought about what needs to be done to fix our brokenness. The idea is alluded to in psalm 41: Heal me for I have sinned against you. Here the psalmist is talking about the fixing of sin. In Hebrew faith, sin has to do with human alienation, separation, and revolt against God. The Bible joins sin and suffering with the basic belief that the root cause of human suffering is disconnection from the Life and Love, Presence and Power of God. People in Jesus' time thought that illness was caused by human sin against God. There was a direct correlation. Therefore, in order for healing to happen, God had to forgive the sin of the person. When God forgave the sin a person was reconnected with the life that God gives. In Hebrew faith, only God could forgive sin. Only God could make a person righteous. Only God could form people in the Holy image of God.

New Testament faith expands that thinking about the correlation between suffering and sin with the thought that humans suffer in our alienation, separation, and revolt against the life and love of the person Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus, The Son of Man, who knows

us best . . . best knows our places of disconnection with God that need to be forgiven. Christians also believe that Jesus, the Son of God, knows the sin in man with which God chooses not to connect. This is why our prayers of confession are made and the assurance of pardon is given in the name of Jesus Christ.

Today we have a gospel story about the time when all the men who couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again, brought their friend to Jesus for healing. The story tells about how Jesus put the man back right.

The middle of the narrative reveals what gift of faith was needed to heal the paralyzed man. *When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus focuses on the disease at the core of the man's being: a broken, incomplete relationship with God. He offers healing through words of forgiveness, so this man may find free access to the love of God that will carry him through all of life---a wholeness that a dysfunctional body cannot deny him.* (italics from Christian Century, Feb. 2000 p. 117 by Douglas Loving)

When we ask, what can heal me and make me whole? The answer that Jesus gave was, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus affirmed the Jewish belief that what was needed to heal a fragmented soul was forgiveness of sin.

The end of the story proclaims Jesus' power and authority

to forgive sin. In the narrative, the man did not walk immediately after being forgiven. A direct correlation between his sin and paralytic state was not easily made. (SAMUEL Feb. 19, 2006 Sermon Seeds) That correlation was postponed until Jesus challenged the hearts of the crowd who were thinking that Jesus was blaspheming against God and claiming God's authority. "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven, or to say: 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" There's an baseball umpire joke that goes: One umpire once said, "there's balls and there's strikes, and I calls 'em as they is." Another said, "there's balls and there's strikes, and I calls 'em as I sees 'em." A third said, "there's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't nothing' till I calls 'em." The early church gave Jesus the authority to call their sin as God sees 'em.

I don't know whether or not God ever righted Sam's fragmented identity and sense of self through a relationship with Jesus Christ, but according to the gospel writer Mark, it happened for the man in his story. When Jesus said to the paralyzed man, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home . . . He did as Jesus told him. He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. Mark 2:12