

FAITH OF FOUR FRIENDS
Mark 2: 1-12 –August 14, 2016
The Church of the Covenant

We probably all remember from our childhood the Bible story of the four friends who raised the roof, cut a hole in it, and let down their paralytic friend to be in the presence of Jesus so their friend could be healed. Several years ago when serving another church I awakened on Sunday morning and was praying as I normally do when I had the strongest impression of this very Bible story. I saw four friends bringing another friend into the presence of Jesus. I had no idea what it meant, but I knew it was significant. Now earlier that week another friend and colleague in ministry had called me on the phone to quiz me about a healing service we hosted at that church. Was it legit? Was it too over the top spiritually? Did people really get healed there? I reassured her that it was legit and also that I was planning on attending so I would meet her there. She told me a story of Renae her friend who had been diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer and she wanted to come to a healing service. So this woman minister friend of mine and some other friends were bringing Renae to this Sunday evening service in downtown Pittsburgh. So I have a long day that Sunday and am running around visiting people and am running late so I am not going to be there at this healing service on time. Nothing new under the sun! I am beating myself up (but have you noticed sometimes that God's plans are better than our plans and that there are times you are SUPPOSED to arrive late!). So I am walking up the side aisle as my minister friend and Renae and other friends are walking up from the other direction. My timing is actually perfect. And we meet at the only open pew about in the middle of the sanctuary. Again, a little too perfect for it not to be planned by a higher intelligence. Renae goes in first, followed by friend one, followed by friend two, followed by friend three, followed by my minister friend, followed by me. Now I am pretty slow on the uptake mostly where God is concerned but even I could count to four and know there were FOUR FRIENDS supporting Renae! And we sit there for the beginning of the service and the man conducting the service walks back the center aisle and begins a conversation with someone one pew back and on the opposite side of the church about healing from Pancreatic Cancer. Again, I am not always the brightest bulb in the pack but even I knew that who he was really speaking to was Renae. So, I am watching a Bible story unfold before my very eyes. The friends all whisper up and down the pew that Renae is in a lot of pain so she may have to leave soon. I whisper back up the pew that we should stay because if we stay I have the hunch that Renae will be healed. My one part in the plan of God was to be "old lead butt" and refuse to move from the end of the pew! So the man in charge of the healing service pivots abruptly and looks Renae directly in the eye, and asks Renae, "So why are you here?" And she bursts out in tears and blurts out, "I have Pancreatic Cancer and you were talking to me!" So he calls her to stand up in the aisle and then asks, "Are there any friends with you tonight?" And he calls the friends to stand up and to gather around Renae. And there set before me is the recapitulation of the Bible story we just read –FOUR FRIENDS bringing their friend into the presence of Jesus in order to be healed.

Our Bible story has Jesus preaching in Capernaum, not too far from where he grew up in Nazareth. He is tired and has retired to a house where the crowds nevertheless still press in on him. They are lined up outside the house ten deep just to try to hear, just to try to be in the presence of Jesus. And four friends bring their paralytic friend on a pallet, carrying him. The crowd is so great that they cannot get in to see Jesus. So the four friends go up on the roof, and remove the roof tiles over the head of Jesus, and they lower their friend into His presence. There was nothing they would not do in order to get their friend into the presence of Jesus. They were desperate. They knew that only Jesus could heal their friend. Only the Son of God could work a miracle that their friend needed that day. They were not embarrassed, nor self-conscious. They were not thinking that "Prayer is a private matter". They were

not fearful and thinking about what others might think of them. They did not care that the owner of the house might be angered by having his roof removed. They were not going to be dissuaded from what they believed God had called them to do. Get their friend into the presence of Jesus. Desperately...at all costs. They were not ashamed of the gospel. They were not like Nicodemus, coming to Jesus by night because as a member of the Sanhedrin he did not want to be seen by others. But desperation gets us over ourselves and over our complexes. When we have exhausted all else, it is then we may enter into the presence of our Lord. When we have tried all else, it is then we try Jesus. So at the end of the story Jesus says to the paralytic –“*Rise, take up your pallet and go home.*” (Mark 2: 11) Immediately the man did precisely this. And the gathered crowd declared in amazement –“*We never saw anything like this!*” Friends, when you’re in the presence of Jesus you’ll see the most amazing things ever!

But the line I find so interesting in it is this. Jesus says: “*And when Jesus saw their faith...*” (Mark 2: 5) When Jesus saw the faith of these four friends, it is then it opened up the possibility of healing in His presence and in His name. I know, I know, I am a good Reformed Calvinist –our faith isn’t the cause of anything a Sovereign God will do. Our faith doesn’t CAUSE God to heal; otherwise our FAITH would control God. And it sets us up for gross disappointment. What if God doesn’t heal? Does that mean that our faith is insufficient? If we had believed better our loved one would still be living? No, our FAITH doesn’t CAUSE GOD to HEAL. But the way I think I would put it is this way –it is not BY OUR FAITH that we are healed, but it is NOT WITHOUT FAITH that we can be healed. Jesus could do not mighty works in His home town Nazareth because of their unbelief. But here in Capernaum, but a few miles away, where four friends had so much faith and were so desperate for their friend that they removed the roof, so believing they were that the presence of Jesus could heal their friend. One place, no miracles; another place, mighty miracles. The difference was the FAITH OF FOUR FRIENDS...

So back to the healing service in downtown Pittsburgh...So the leader of the service asks if Renae wants to be healed, surrounded as she is by her four friends. Yes, she wants to be healed. And she describes being in a great deal of pain, so much so that she almost left the service early. And the man asks her: “And are you in pain now, Renae?” And she stops in amazement and blurts out, “No, all the pain is gone!” And her four friends dance around her in glee, “We never saw anything like this!” What if they had not brought her to the service? What if they had not hoped and believed? What if they had not run the gauntlet of parking in a parking garage in downtown Pittsburgh? What if they had not been desperate for their friend? What if they had done nothing?

A postscript to this story...Renae was indeed miraculously but temporarily healed from the cancer. And three years later was to succumb to her disease. But she never had another day of pain with it ever again. Why wasn’t she completely healed? Why did God take away her pain but not the disease? I do not know and never will in this life. I’m not here to explain it; I’m just here to tell you what I saw with my own eyes. By the way, when I take your hand and pray for you in the hospital I’m not just blathering out some nice platitudes to be nice. I am bringing you into the presence of Jesus. For HE ALONE can heal.

Beloved, there is probably someone in your life who you need to bring into the presence of Jesus. Be unstoppable. Don’t be embarrassed. Have faith. And if you are tempted to stop because something tells you, you can’t. Just remember the story of the Faith of Four Friends. Only be desperate enough to really believe. And then you CAN! Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*