

Mark 2:1-12
What Are Friends For?
WRCoB 1.7.24

What are friends for?

Do I even have to ask that question.

I do, due to the fact that in today's society
We are having less friends
And experiencing more isolation.

Consequently, we are a lonely people.

Studies show we are lonelier today than we've ever been
Particularly adult males.

The reason for this includes

- People working longer hours (thereby having less time for friends)
- Moving from one's hometown to another location for work (many of the closest friendships are made during growing up and schooling years)
- Spending more time with raising kids (parents spend twice as much time with children now than in previous generations)
- Society and culture less conducive to establishing friendships (car culture, less time walking and visiting neighbors, home entertainment centers, more suspicion of strangers)

There's an expression in the Hausa language
When you haven't seen someone for awhile.

Kwana biu (literally two days)

I asked someone how that expression came into being.

He said that in the old days in the life of the village
It was expected one would frequent every household

If you hadn't done so
When they saw you
They would say, kwana biu.

It was an established community network
To make sure all was well within the community.

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We are God-designed to live in community
And to have friendships outside of family.

What are friends for?

Friends can be your closest ally.

There are things you can tell a friend
That you can't tell a family member.

Friends believe in you.

They stand beside you when you're down
And dance with you when you're up

Friends remind you what's important in life
And offer you a perspective no one else can.

And if they're Christian all the better
They pray for you and intercede on your behalf.

They are there to encourage you
When you feel discouraged
To enable you when you feel unable.
To empower you when you feel powerless

A good friend won't abandon you
Even when you've done something really stupid.

And in today's encounter with Jesus
Good friends bring you into the presence
Of the divine healer, Jesus Christ.

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It's early in Jesus' ministry

Jesus is out and about ministering throughout Galilee.

He is driving out demons, healing the sick
And teaching the values of kingdom living.

Mark says Capernaum is now where Jesus lives
Most likely in the house of Simon Peter.

Jesus went there to find rest.

When people heard he was home
So many people had gathered
That the house was completely filled.

People crowded outside the front door
And peered in every window

But instead, of a lot of pushing and shoving
Everyone was quiet and listening to Jesus.

There was a spiritual hunger being fed
By the presence of the Master.

Along about this time, four men came carrying a paralytic.

They realized they couldn't get anywhere close

Rather than fight the crowd

They walked up the outside staircase to the roof.

Now the roof was flat

It was made from mud plastered onto fairly large sticks.

The four dug down through the plastered mud

Down through the small branches

Down into the opening below.

All the rubble from their excavation

Fell down on the people below.

When they got the opening big enough

They lowered their friend on the mat

Down into the crowded room below.

When Jesus saw that kind of faith

He said to the man on the mat

"Your sins are forgiven."

Now, why would Jesus say this?

What does sin have to do with his paralysis?

Jesus sees what we cannot see.

Jesus sees the deep connections

Between spiritual, mental and physical health.

As James says

James 5:16 NIV Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

There is healing power in the forgiveness of sins.

“Your sins are forgiven,” Jesus declared.

There were within the room
Teachers and ministers of the faith
Church folk I’d call them.

And they began mumbling and grumbling.

*What gives this guy the ability to forgive sins?
God alone has the power to forgive sins.*

But Jesus asked them.

*Which is easier, to tell this man his sins are forgiven?
Or to tell him to stand up, take his mat, and walk?*

And without waiting for an answer
He told the paralytic
Get up, take your mat and go home.

And the paralytic got up took his mat and left
And everyone stood with their mouth open.

~~

As I consider the lesson here
A couple things come to mind.

First, there is a connection between forgiveness and healing.

And whether the paralysis was due to sin
Or physical illness
Or a combination of both

Through Jesus' healing
Both sin and physical illness
Lose their ability to paralyze.

Jesus forgives sins
Jesus heals body and soul.

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Secondly, in verse 5, Mark writes
And when Jesus saw "their" faith?

Whose faith?
The faith of the four friends.

So determined they were to see their friend healed
They went to extreme measures

They broke a hole through the roof
Of the home where Jesus was staying
That prompted Jesus to heal him.

Let's hope they returned the next day to repair the damages

The passage doesn't say whether the paralytic had faith
And it really doesn't matter if he did or didn't.

It was his friends who prompted Jesus to heal the paralytic.

What are friends for?

This is what friends are for.

What an incredible blessing to have friends like that.

Would that we have friends like that.

Would that we be friends like that.

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The special number Vanessa sung

Sums it up quite well

The importance of having good friends

When pain or sorrow is too much to bear

When your heart feels numb unable to care

When faith seems so pointless that you cannot pray

When no one knows quite what to say . . .

Hold on, hold on

To find a way to get through

And when your hope is gone

And you can't hold on

We will hold on for you.

If God is silent when you need to hear

That you're not alone, comfort is near

If you are abandoned when you need a friend

When all good things come to an end

Then hold on, hold on, find a way through

And when your hope is gone
And you can't hold on
We will hold on to you.

This is what friends are for?

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We are friends here.

This is a safe place.

The genius of the church is its community.

We may not view things the same.

We may be in different places
On the theological, political
And the socioeconomic continuum.

But we're brothers and sisters in Christ
And we will hold on to each other

Ephesians 6:18 CEV

¹⁸ Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.

On one occasion
I was asked to anoint someone in absentia.

In other words, she wanted me to anoint her
For the sake of someone else.

This was early on in my ministry

I had never done this kind of thing before.

But if we believe in the power of intercessory prayer
Then we should believe
In the power of intercessory anointing.

I gladly anointed her on behalf of her friend

And so, this morning I want to offer the anointing service
For anyone here who feels a need of its power
To forgive, to strengthen and to heal.

I also want to offer the anointing service
For anyone here to be anointed for a friend in need.

James 5:13-16 CEB

¹³ If any of you are suffering, they should pray. If any of you are happy, they should sing. ¹⁴ If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵ Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve.

We will sing the first of two closing songs.

When we finished singing the first song
Vanessa will lead us into singing Sweet Holy Spirit

At that time

We will enter our service of anointing.

If you are being anointed for someone else

Quietly speak their name as I anoint you

So that I know and can be in mutual prayer for them.

Seriously, what are friends for?