

“That’s What True Friends Are For!”

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Mark 2:1-12

Mark Shepherd tells a story of an incident that happened in England a few years ago. It happened at the close of a soccer game. A player by the name of Steve Morrow who scored the game winning goal for his team to win the League Cup championship. In their celebration his teammates tossed him into the air. But, unfortunately, they failed to catch him on the way down. Morrow was carried off the field on a stretcher with a broken arm and an oxygen mask on his face.

Yes, his so-called teammate friends, threw him in the air, but in their excitement, they were not there to catch him!

This story came to mind as I read the scripture for today. Jesus is in Capernaum. Word had spread that Jesus was in town. So people crowded into the streets and the home where he was staying.

Some men came to the home bringing with them a man who was paralyzed. Since they could not get him to Jesus through the door because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof, or used one that was already there, and lowered him down to the floor where Jesus would notice him. Read Mark 2:1-12.

Now, this was not as ridiculous as it may sound, to cut a hole in someone’s roof. William Barclay tells us that Palestinian houses had flat roofs. These roofs were used for many purposes; for storing things; and as places of quiet and prayer. Thus, they often had a outside stairs up to the roof. The roof consisted of beams laid wall to wall. The spaces between the beams were filled with close-packed reeds and rushes and the branches of thorn bushes. This was then covered over with mortar and topped with a covering of marled earth.

In most cases, it was easy then to get onto the roof. It was possible to remove the filling between the beams and it didn’t do much damage that could be easily repaired. In fact, it is said that in some cases this is the way coffins were gotten into homes for family wakes at the time of death, as the doorways were too narrow.

Not an easy thing to do, yet the task of getting the man before Jesus was accomplished. Jesus noticed the faith of these men on behalf of their friend. Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

What a contrast! The soccer players in England and these men who cared for their friend. That’s what friends are for! And in our gospel lesson for today - it brings healing.

I would like to think that this is how a group of men or a group

of women in a church would be. Maybe a Sunday School class. Or a Bible Study class. A place where we would not forget a friend and let them crash. Rather, we would remember our friend and bring them to

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Jesus.

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman reported that Jesus healed some forty people personally and directly during his earthly ministry. Of this number, thirty-four were brought to him by friends or family members. Or Jesus was taken by others to the ailing person. Only six of the forty people healed in the Gospels found their way to Jesus, or he to them, without someone giving assistance. (John Shedd in *God's Little Devotional Book for the Class*)

So the first thing I want us to notice is that **a true friend brings you to Jesus**. Often it is the other way around. Those we call friends are those who by their attitudes and actions actually drive us away from Jesus. Their values do not bring out the best in us when we are with them. Now, they may not necessarily be bad people. They are simply of this world. Faith often plays little or no role in their lives, they make their decisions on what feels good, or on what is in their best interest. They may turn out to be persons who use or abuse you.

Yes, we may have friends and acquaintances who actually push us away from Jesus. They are creating a hostile spiritual environment.

On the other hand, I hope we all have more friends who because of their values and attitudes, actually help us to draw closer to Jesus. These are the people we should cherish. People of character, faith and in tune with Jesus. These are the ones that will bring us to Jesus and that's what friends are for!

The next thing I want us to notice is that **a true friend is there when you need them**. Yes, when we are in need is when we discover who our true friends are. The men in our scripture lesson today gathered around to help the man find help he needed. Times of crises show us who are friends really are. Because there are some who will actually flee from us or ignore us. They are too busy looking after their own lives. While true friends seek us out and help us get whatever assistance we might need. These are the real gifts in life. That's what true friends are!

There is one more thing for us to notice in this encounter with Jesus. Like the men who brought their friend to Jesus-**we need to be a friend to others**. And here is the best way to see that this happens. To ensure that there are friends there for us when we need them is to be there when they need us. To be wise in this world is to be sure during our lifetime we build up a host of friends.

There was a man who complained of loneliness. He was advised to "make three new friends and see what happens."

He later said, “I made three new friends and nothing happened. Now I’m stuck with three new friends!” Obviously, they were not much of a relationship or the man was determined to be lonely. Yet,

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there people who feel like that. For them, friendship is a burden. And it is true, sometimes making friends can be awkward.

It’s like the elementary school teacher who wanted her students to feel like they belong. One day during recess she noticed a girl standing by herself on one side of a playing field while the rest of the kids enjoyed a game of soccer at the other side. The teacher approached the lone girl and asked if she was all right. The girl said she was.

A little later, the teacher noticed the girl was in the same spot, still by herself. The teacher went over to her and asked, “Would you like me to be your friend?”

The girl hesitated, then said, “Okay,” looking at the teacher suspiciously.

Feeling she was making progress, the teacher then asked, “Why are you standing here all alone?”

“Because,” the girl said with great exasperation, “I’m the goalie!”

Making friends isn’t always easy. It may take some intentionality on our part to keep working at being a friend. As we never know when we are making headway or being noticed. Each time we make an effort to be a friend, remember God can use that effort to touch the life of another for good! Especially if we invite them to worship, Bible study or other church activities. Places where they might find Jesus. That’s what true friends are for.

Stu Weber in his book *Men of Integrity* tells of the training he received while he was in the Army Ranger School. He remembers it to be brutal. It doesn’t take much for him to still hear the raspy voice of the sergeant: “We are here to save your lives. We’re going to see to it that you overcome all your natural fears. We’re going to show you just how much incredible stress the human mind and body can endure. And when we’re finished with you, you will be the U.S. Army’s best!”

Then, before the sergeant dismissed the formation, he announced their first assignment. The young recruits steeled themselves for something really tough-like running 10 miles in full battle gear or rappelling down a sheer cliff. Instead, the sergeant told them to find a buddy. “Find yourself a Ranger buddy,” he growled. “You will stick together. You will never leave each other. You will encourage each other, and, as necessary, you will carry each other.” It was the army’s way of saying, “Difficult assignments require a friend.

Together is better.”

The same is true for us in life. “Who’s your ‘Ranger buddy’?”
Who are those people you know will be there for you when you need
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friend? Likewise, who are those people who know you will be there
for them when they need somebody? Again, the wisest thing a person
can do throughout a lifetime besides building a relationship with Jesus
is to develop a reservoir of friends. How are you doing with this? Are
you being intentional about making friends and bringing them to
Jesus?

As Dr. John Shedd notes, not only do you become like the
friends with whom you associate, but when you choose to hang out
with friends who are like Jesus, you will find yourself imitating Jesus
more and more. My friends, –that’s what true friends are!