

## Sunday Service: Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020

Good Morning, and welcome to our church-less, church service.

Perhaps stop before we start; make yourself a hot drink, get comfortable, leave any distractions to one side and feel relaxed as we consciously enter into the presence of God.

Although far different from our normal service, I do wish to try and continue the themes we have been developing so far this year, and this morning this is third in our little series, of the miracles that are recorded in Mark's gospel. Today being the healing of the paralytic.

It is of course also Mother's Day and we shall try and intertwine these two themes as we worship our God.

I don't think you could have missed the marketing campaign HSBC has recently been running – drawing to our attention the international world we live in and challenging us to think about where our home is, in an international, and multi-cultural world.



It is a sensitive and provocative subject for many and one in which we all like to nail our colours to any particular mast, especially around the time of the 6 Nations rugby. I might appear to be dyed in the wool Scotsman, I have the shirts, scarves and flags to prove it, but even a cursory glance at my surname reveals that I am not that deeply dyed – only 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, with plenty of Italian blood coursing through my veins.

I am also a fiercely patriotic Glaswegian and despite my love for that city and everything from it, I both prefer and choose to live in Cheshire. Does this somehow then compromise my nationality, or hometown? Personally, I think not.

But where would Jesus, call home? Bethlehem, the town of His birth. The ancestral home of His family, that city of David, after all He was descended on both mother's, and as supposed, father's side from King David?

Or Nazareth, that town where He was raised and educated. A town which He could later critique by saying that a prophet has no honour in His own country.

We might also argue that this world was not His home, but rather it was heaven. Although the counter argument would be that when He took on flesh, He became human and that earth is the domain of humankind.

However, when we enter into the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Mark's gospel, we find an answer and it might not be what we were expecting.

*Mark 2:1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.*

We are not explicitly told where in Capernaum this place called home, was. Was this His own place? My personal view is that in the context of the story of the narrative, this was the home of Andrew and Peter, where the Lord had recently healed Peter's mother in law.

So, Jesus' home is described as not His place of birth, the town of His upbringing, nor even heaven but rather the place where He felt comfortable, cared for and loved. Is it a little too much conjecture, to think how much of this was due to the part played by Peter's mother in law?

Today, is of course, a little tender for Christine and I. It is our first Mother's Day since we lost Netta, my mother in law and with the social boundaries in place, difficult to meet with those close to us. Perhaps for the first time, we in a real sense understand that the celebration of mothers is not always, all flowers and chocolate. For there are many whose relationship is difficult with their mother, or mothers with their children, or like Christine there can be that raw sense of loss, making today both difficult and challenging. Yet, this should not take away from the fact that all mothers play an important and indeed critical part in the lives of their offspring. And when this relationship does not go well, the pain and hurt, testifies to the importance of the bond. For while relationships might fail or fall, a mother's influence, even though the simplest of biological principles, can never be fully taken away.

We know from our Wedding Services, quoting from His Word, that it is a purpose of God that we should leave mother and father, and cleave to our spouses. Yet, it would appear from this narrative that parents, or at least Peter's mother in law remained a fixture in his life and helped constituted what became the Lord's home.

Let's pray together.

*Our God and Father, we thank you for the opportunity to come into your presence and whilst we might not be meeting in a place and with the people whose presence we usually enjoy, we pray that we might still be blessed from this experience, dwelling on your word, reflecting in song that we might know Your presence with us.*

*On this special day, we would thank you for our mothers and for all those positive influences in our lives, and as Jesus found peace and comfort in the home of Peter and his mother in law, so too may our homes be places of contentment, especially in these challenging times.*

*We give thanks for all those who have helped make them thus, especially our mothers.*

*Bless us now our Father as we worship together through the songs before us and as we consider Your word may it be a blessing in our lives, particularly during these trying times.*

*We ask this, in and through the name of Jesus, Amen.*

## **Notices**

*I have been informed by the Baptist Union that there is a national call to prayer from Churches Together in England at 7pm, this Sunday. Individuals are asked to mark this occasion by placing a candle in their windows.*

*Open the Book have received a very complimentary letter from Bollinbrook School about their service there. Further an article will be appearing in their "in-house," magazine acknowledging our Christmas Tree Appeal and procuring 15 Lion Bibles.*

*The decision has been taken to cancel the usual activities around Christian Aid week. We can imagine the knock on effect this will have on this work, which this year is focussed on Kenya's water shortage and famine. On top of this Kenya is suffering*

*under a plague of locusts, dreadful times for this impoverished nation. We can still support this work, through their website;*

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>

*And of course, during this strange and challenging time remember to look out for each other, heeding the advice given to us by our Government about self-isolation and social distancing. For obvious reasons, I don't propose doing visits but am happy to do shopping, and doorstep chats. My number is 07595 728739, and on that subject, please endeavour to call each other, to those we know well, and those we barely know, to support and encourage each other.*

Our first song then, is our theme song for Mark's gospel, the Servant King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpwfDXcKrNQ>

This is the great paradox, that God, in the form of Jesus came from heaven, to go through that garden of tears, given his hands over to nails, hands that placed the stars into their orbit, so that we might come into relationship with Him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BM4glcRKoic>

What then makes a mother? Our song suggested that Jesus is more faithful than a mother, the implication being of course that mothers are faithful, a fact that Jesus alluded to when He said, about the Holy City.

*Mt 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"*

The idea being that the mother hen, would put herself into danger to protect her young. This faithfulness is not just some sense of misplaced loyalty but rather a deliberate and sacrificial act of surrender, to ensure the best for her children. And what mother doesn't make sacrifices for their children?

In that we also have a sense of Christ, making that greatest of all sacrifices, dying that we might live.

*Ro 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Our Bible Reading is the first twelve verses of Mark 2.

**1 ¶ A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.**

**2 So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.**

**3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.**

**4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralysed man was lying on.**

**5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."**

**6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,**

**7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**

**8 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?**

**9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?**

**10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic,**

**11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."**

**12 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!"**

At the original time of planning this service, before all the changes, I had thought it pertinent to have a children's, a Kids Club song on Mother's Day. It seems less obvious now but nevertheless the words, as always in these children's songs give a greater weight than the simplicity of the melody would imply. Thinking less about mother's but parents in a more general sense.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXoZptuJp24>

I suspect that this story about the paralytic being let in through the roof, is well known to many of us. How many of us, though had clocked where it had taken

place? We aren't specifically told where it was that Jesus had returned to, but that the town was His home, a fact echoed by Matthew and I suspect that He was frequently a guest at the home of Peter, and of course his mother in law. I don't think then that is stretching it too far, to suggest that this was Peter's home.

Of course, later in His itinerant ministry, He would say that the foxes have their holes, the birds their nests but that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head. But nevertheless, I like the thought that in the early days of His ministry in Galilee, his base was in Capernaum and more often than not, this had Him stay with Peter and his extended family.

Not that it really matters where His home was, or where these events took place, except to say that we can presume that the home was precious to whoever it belonged to. Yet, when it came to the healing of this man, the perception of what is precious, changes. Perhaps in these days of Coronavirus, we are learning, to re-appraise our opinion of worth?

As usual, but perhaps more briefly than usual I want to look at three little points from this well know story. These are;

- Enthusiasm
- Enlightening
- Evidence

We cannot help but be impressed with the enthusiasm that the crowd had for Jesus, the place was packed. The crowd had thronged around Jesus, He was relatively new into His public ministry, and the things He did and said, were soon drawing a crowd. Although not all necessarily for the right reasons.

Perhaps for some, it was His novelty value. He had been in the town for a previous Sabbath, and he had then snuck out of the town. He was discovered by Simon and presumably the disciples from which he had gone on a healing and preaching tour of Galilee before He had now, returned to Capernaum. They wanted to see what the fuss was all about before He might disappear again.

The "availability," of Jesus is not guaranteed. We expect that there is a day coming when He will return, but not as Saviour but as Lord of Lord and King of Kings. The concept of Grace will give way to Justice and for many it will be too late.

*2Co 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.*

Then of course, there were the "religious folk," no doubt wanting to also see what the fuss was about. Maybe too, they were there out of a sense of duty, after all if this man was speaking about their God, then they ought to be there. Perhaps though, it was more important for them to measure Him and His teaching up against what they (thought) they knew. They were already predisposed as to what this all meant, they wouldn't change their minds.

Perhaps, you think you know what it is all about, and you mentally nod your assent, to what you accept as truth but critically shake your head at those things you might find less palatable, or acceptable. When we should be checking this out, not with what we think we know but rather against His word.

But in amongst it all, were the genuine seekers, not least of which were the four men, who knew that Jesus was the way to sort out their friend's life, and nothing, not even a roof was going to get in their way. Could it be that in the coming days and weeks, as the constraints around this disease and its impact on society becomes much more pronounced, as folk have a real sense of danger giving rise to fear, that folks might enthusiastically want to seek Him

*Isa 55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.*

What about us? With this chaos and change all around us, are we too busy to enthusiastically seek Him. Perhaps now is the time we should! Although, in these times of trial, we should re-assure ourselves with His promises to us;

*1Pe 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

One of the other things that surprised me about this story as I re-visited it, was that the Lord wasn't particularly engaged in doing miraculous works, rather he was teaching.

*Mark 2:2 So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.*

Let's be honest, wouldn't we rather see Jesus do miraculous works rather than teach? Maybe I am on my own on that. Would you rather be seeing Him, clear up this Coronavirus mess, rather than listening to His word? Yet, its from His word that we will find succour and comfort.

He was enlightening them, that was that He was shedding light onto what they had been brought up to believe. He was taking the darkness of the Jewish law that they were living under, and shining the light on this, so that they say more the graciousness of God, rather than His punitive nature, which was what the law makers had made His word become. The reality of their lives had become significantly different from what God intended, and this was the revelation that Jesus was bringing to them.

There is a danger that our theology becomes based on our custom and practice. I know that I can find myself at times squirming in the presence of my fellow ministers where they roll out some idea, or dogma that has absolutely no basis in Biblical teaching, but yet for them it has become a bedrock of their faith, usually only through the traditions of men.

We as Baptists, or Independents as I like to think of us, with little denominational baggage are of course, the so-called “free,” church. And we are freer, to search out the scriptures, to check and challenge, those things we hear taught and practiced, but do we? Aren’t we in danger too then, of accepting what we are told rather than searching out the scriptures? You must challenge, what I say, or indeed write but comparing it to God’s word. Unlike some church leaders, I am far from infallible.

We are not told what it was that Jesus was specifically teaching them on this occasion, other than He preached the, “word.” This is the generic Greek word, *Logos* – which was applicable to Christ, as John used it but it is also used as simply the things that someone has said. It would be presumptuous to assume that this word, was applicable to Him, in this instance, there being nothing in the text to substantiate that view.

However, I am sure that a key topic of His would have been the Way to God, and the forgiveness of sin. Sin, that wilful disobedience of us all, those behaviours and attitudes that keep us from God, that builds a chasm between us. Of course, for many of those religious leaders they would see the forgiveness of sin, as being through their sacrificial offerings and their own self-righteousness. This was an argument that Jesus frequently met head on, and perhaps this occasion was no different.

But yet, it soon became different when the palsied man was brought directly in front of Jesus, having been lowered through the roof of the house. The reaction of Jesus to this, was to simply say, "Son, your sins are forgiven." We can almost image these religious leaders choking. "Who can forgive sins, but God alone," they retorted.

As I said, we are not sure of what specifically Jesus was teaching here but I am sure it was pertinent to the miracle that He had just performed, but more pertinent to those words used in healing. He asserted that He, the Son of Man, had the authority to forgive sins. He was not disagreeing with those who said that God alone could forgive sins, but was claiming that He had permission, the authority from God to do so Himself. And of course, we know that that right, that authority was to be gained at Calvary.

I don't really think that Jesus used those words of healing because they were easier to say than the alternative. Although that might have been suggested. I believe that Jesus, would have been talking about the way to God, the forgiveness of sins and that this palsied man gave Him the opportunity to make a clear and irrevocable statement, that He had this right, a right that was then evidenced by the healing of the man. A healing that was made on the basis of faith, the faith of the man's four friends.

Like many, I have a real sense of frustration. I am frustrated that I am having to write this service, and not delivering it in person. I am frustrated that life appears to have been put on hold, and while this might be for only twelve weeks it is a long stretch ahead of us, and the things that frequently lift my spirits; grandchildren, especially the imminent granddaughter's birthday, weekends away to watch a game of rugby and a family holiday, all look like being cancelled. And yes, I know that these are small and selfish things, that people are losing their lives and more significant disruption is happening to others that make my frustration pale into insignificance. But regardless of the size of our disappointments, they are our disappointments and naturally give rise to frustration, perhaps a frustration borne out of the fact that there is little we can do about it.

But how might this palsied man have felt about his life until this point? Then his four friends take him to see Jesus, and rather than simply healing Him, giving Him a sense of life that he had not previously enjoyed. But rather than a simple healing

Jesus says to him, that his sins were forgiven, and then this was accompanied by His healing.

Perhaps, we need once again to come and experience Jesus, feeling as we do like this palsied man, impotent to those things happening around us. To re-affirm us as His, to be encouraged about life, despite today's constraints but perhaps more importantly to remind our hearts, that our sins are forgiven, that we are His and, in His time, things are going to be so much better. Let's pray together.

*Our God and Father, we thank you for Jesus, for what He has done for us, so that we can claim you as ours, can cry out, "Abba, Father." We thank you, that we know as this palsied man knew, that our sins are forgiven but also that we have, through Jesus been brought into your family.*

*But Father at this time, as we, our nation and our world struggles, we pray your blessing to be on us, your people. We pray for our health and wellbeing, pray especially for the most vulnerable that they might be kept safe. We pray too, for our scientists as they seek solutions to the pandemic and our medical providers and carers as they seek to provide care, support and of course healing.*

*We think of our young people, and the schools as they close tomorrow, keep them safe. But Father more than this, we pray that through this pandemic, that people might turn back to you, that your glory might be seen, and that you would bless and encourage us, your people to shine for you, as lights in darkness. Amen*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXPPzuCJMCS>

*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*