

Removing the Roof

[Mark 2:1-12]

K Karpen, Sunday, February 19, 2006
Seventh Sunday After Epiphany

[Mark 2:1-12, "Removing the Roof," K Karpen, Sunday, February 19, 2006]

"When they could not bring him to Jesus...they removed the roof above Jesus, dug through it, and let down the mat on which he lay..."

I'd like to begin by singing the song on your insert.

I don't feel no ways tired, ----- I come too far from where I
Started from, ----- Nobody told me that the road would be
Easy, ----- I don't believe you brought me this far to leave me. -----

("I Don't Feel No Ways Tired," c. 1978 by Savgos Music, Inc. All rights reserved.)

I've been singing this song to myself for the past week, mostly because it expresses exactly the opposite of how I've been feeling. I don't know what it is... Was it the snow & slush that made an ordinary walk around the corner some kind of arctic expedition? Was it our pathetic & frustrating political situation where difficult things are over-simplified and simple things seem impossibly difficult? Was it watching the Olympics and knowing that the worst ones could do things with their bodies that most of the rest of us can't even imagine? And yet they, too, so often get in their own way. Is it, for me, the delightful frustration of helping to raise a cute but irrational 4-year-old? Is it trying to do well a job I love but don't always feel equal to?

I don't know. But there were a couple of days I had to work at willing myself to get off my chair & stand up. Like there was some physical entity right over my head keeping me from getting up. Most of this week I've been thinking, I just feel all ways tired! I've come 6 feet from where I started. Nobody told me that the roads would be this slushy. I don't wanna believe you brought me this far and left me.

Days like that are what make me love this story of the paralyzed man with some friends who don't let a little thing like a roof stand between their friend and his healing. We don't know what is paralyzing this man. Mark doesn't know or doesn't care. I don't want to over-psychologize his ailment. Most things have a mental and physical side, but Jesus seems to believe that the problem is spiritual—some sort of malaise of spirit that weighs this guy down and makes him literally unable to move. Some thing or things in his history that keeps him stuck where he is. Able to see the road ahead, perhaps, but totally unable to do anything himself that helps him get up and get moving.

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Luckily, he's got some friends. And his friends carry him to Jesus. Now, where is Jesus? Mark simply says Jesus was "at home." Literally "in the house" (*en oiko*) but *en oiko* really means at home.

But did Jesus have a home? If so, this is the only place we hear about it. Maybe he's back at Peter's house. At home in Peter's house. Jesus is the kind of person who's at home wherever he is. The trouble is, wherever he is, everybody knows he's there. Everybody knows he's in the house, and the house is full of people who are thirsty for a word from him. And these friends have brought their friend to hear Jesus, but they are not going to be able to get near Jesus, and neither is their friend.

So what do they do? They remove the roof! That's what it says! I don't make this up. They remove the roof over Jesus' head, they dig through whatever's in the way, they tie ropes to the mat, and they lower the guy down—practically on Jesus' lap.

When I was growing up we used to draw pictures of this in Sunday School. We used to act it out, after a fashion, though it was really dangerous to be the guy on the mat, and it wasn't too safe to be Jesus, either.

They lower their friend down through the roof, into their house. Jesus is impressed. Jesus is amazed. When he sees the faith of these friends he says to the man on the mat, "Son, your sins are forgiven." This is why I really don't think this was Jesus' house. If this was his house, I think he'd be saying, Yo! What are you doing to my roof!?!?

But Jesus is loving this. Finally, here are some people who know that if you really care about something, really want something, really feel called to something, you sometimes have to be willing to remove the roof! Friends who know that every one of God's promises is a "yes." They remove the roof. Literally, it says they un-roofed the roof. They made the roof so it wasn't a roof. Wasn't a barrier. Wasn't a limiter. Wasn't an obstacle to them anymore. Jesus says, "My God, what faith your friends have."

But we tend to see a roof as a roof. We let the roof-makers of the world keep us out. Keep us down. I was coming out of the church yesterday, and someone I know slightly from the neighborhood was looking at the signboard and reading the sermon title. And she said, "Is that what the new scaffolding is for?"

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We tend to see a roof as a roof. But my question to you is, what's your roof? In your life, what's keeping you out? What's holding you back? What's keeping you away from the future God would love for you to have? A future of wholeness & health & faith? A lot of times we have the vision. I have a vision for this place you wouldn't believe. I have a vision for all of you that you, you wouldn't believe. I don't think it's my vision. I think it's God's vision.

The vision is there; but we gotta remove the roof. A vision of a congregation no longer hemmed in by the frailties of this poor old, lovely, amazing building. What a vision! But we gotta remove the roof. A place where New Yorkers of all shapes & sizes, languages & races, rich and poor flock to get what they need and give what they've got. It's a good vision. But we gotta remove the roof.

I have a vision where each of you is no longer held back by things that aren't real. None of you is held back by the frustrations of your age, or what happened to you, or what somebody thinks of you. None of you is weighed down by depression or kept back by subtle or not so subtle oppression. None of you is kept from a relationship with God by the sin and sickness of God's imperfect messengers. None of you is kept from a healthy relationship with another by commissions of omissions of the past. I got this vision. We just gotta remove a few roofs.

When I get that vision & I think about those roofs coming down, I don't feel so weary. I don't feel so tired. I wanna sing...

I don't feel no ways tired, ----- I come too far from where I
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Easy, ----- I don't believe you brought me this far to leave me. -----

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