

## **Salvation and healing**

### **(Mark 2:1-12)**

The beginning of St Mark's gospel introduces us to Jesus and the Kingdom of God. It gives us a sense of how exciting and unsettling, how affirming and healing, the presence of Jesus can be.

Were you listening carefully to the story I just read? If you were, do you, like me have lots of questions that you want to ask?

Jesus is in Capernaum, at Peter's house where he had stayed before, and where he had healed Peter's mother-in-law.

What has gone on in Capernaum between Jesus' last visit and this?

Had the locals known that Peter's mother-in-law was sick, and have they seen her now, walking about looking just fine? Have they asked how she got better? Is this why they are packing the house, waiting to hear what Jesus has to say?

St Mark tells us that Jesus was speaking the word to the gathered crowd – what was he speaking about? Did he say 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near' – was this his message to every person in every place – as Mark has suggested elsewhere?

Every time Jesus comes to Peter's house the whole town gathers. Everyone brings their sick relatives and friends – did Peter's family find this annoying, or was it just wonderful to see the Kingdom of God appearing before their eyes?

Now the paralysed man – what was wrong with him? Had he been like this all his life, or was his disability a recently thing – a work accident, illness, or stroke?

Was he able to speak – no words of his are recorded in the story?

We are told a largish group of folk decide to take him to Jesus – with four carrying him. Did they ask him? I hope so! What did they expect Jesus to do? Last time a crowd gathered at Peter's house Jesus had healed many, many people – was this what they hoped for their friend?

When they got to Peter's house, and had to go up on the roof, whose idea was it to take the roof off, to dig through, and lower the paralysed man. Did they say to him – don't worry, we wont drop you? I hope they did!

And then, were they disappointed when the first thing Jesus does is not heal the man, but to say to the man 'Child (Son), your sins are forgiven'.

And the paralysed man, someone now so much on the edge of things because of his disability – was he surprised to hear that he was a child/son... of God, of the kingdom? And

his sins, all of them, forgiven already, before he confesses – was this wonderful news? I think so – status and standing, a child of God and free – what better news is there to hear?

And then, most amazingly, following the criticism of the Scribes (who also squeezed into the house, so that they did not miss anything that they could have a bit of a moan about) – Jesus also healed him.

Salvation and healing – this is what Jesus brought. And this is what the man received.

He was able to obey Jesus' instruction to pick up his bed and walk. Did he mind? Of course not!

So this is what we have tonight, a story about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, to set the agenda for Ruth and St James' church as they begin this new chapter together.

What does this story have to say to us? I wonder, what struck you as you heard the gospel read, and as you have considered it now for a little longer?

I have had a little time to think and pray with this passage in preparing for this evening, to wonder how we might find ourselves in this story? Who might the paralysed man be today, who are the friends?

So I want to begin by saying this:

The church of St James the Less is not sick, it is not paralysed, far from it. But it is a church that needs to be helped into the presence of Jesus.

As I have come to know the congregation here through the past few months what strikes me is the faithfulness. If you come to worship here on a Sunday morning you will encounter a congregation that desires to be faithful and holy. More than this, here the members of the church love each other, and care for each other deeply. After worship it is very rare indeed for a single person to leave straight away, all remain to support each other through friendship. And, beyond Sundays, members of this church do all that they can to support each other.

What has been clear through the last months is that this congregation is small, and it is also, in the most part, elderly and frail. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the standard of loving care that has marked this church for so long.

So it is with courage and faith that that church has decided to use some of its financial resources to support a priest. Two things are happening here. The church is saying, we need help now in maintaining worship and pastoral care. The second thing is this, they are saying that they are open to God doing a new thing among them or around them. This is why they have called Ruth to be their priest in charge. They are not paralysed, but they are looking for a new season of salvation and healing here in this place.

And Ruth, importantly, knows that she is not Jesus, but that in his name and empowered by the Spirit, her focus here can be healing and salvation.

Ruth's first vocation was as a nurse. She brings to her second vocation, that of a priest, considerable pastoral gifts. She will care for the members of St James with patience and

kindness, understanding that although faith might not diminish with age, energies certainly do. And Ruth is also a missionary – as all priests should be. She will be looking for ways to help this congregation share the love they have for each other with others, with those who do not yet know Christ. She will be looking for ways to make partnerships locally for the good of those who live round and about, or who pass the door of this church every day. She will be wanting to help this church deepen its relationships with the other churches in the City, especially St Mary's Carden Place, building on the good foundations already in place.

In all of this Ruth will be wanting to show the truth of what is in the gospel – that healing and salvation, being made whole, and coming to know that you are a child of God, are two sides of the same coin.

Ruth does not rush. She is steady and prayerful, patient and kind. She will serve from among you, she will be one of you.

Finally, I have something to say to the rest of us here, those of us who represent the diocese. I call us all to be true friends to St James. In the gospel passage today, the friends of the paralysed man brought him to Jesus – a large group of them, more than the four who carried him. It is our role to bring this church, elderly and frail as it is in its most part, to Jesus. We see from the gospel that this will require a little effort. The friends made the journey, climbed up the outside of the building and dug through the roof, so that their friend could hear and see Jesus. So we too, in our hearts and prayers, must bring this church, and its new priest-in charge, to Jesus. This is a very significant chapter in this church's life – we are not going to go from this church this evening and just leave them to it.

Church of St James, Ruth – please know that it is our desire to support and help you as you together take this next step of faith in obedience to God's call. With you we will look to see what God does next, and we, with you, hope to say with amazement, as did those who saw the healing of the paralyzed man: 'We have never seen anything like this'.