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**Series:** It's a Miracle!

**Title:** Through the Roof

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**Text:** [Luke 5:17-26](#)

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[Watch Service](#)



Last week, we began a four-week series looking at some of Jesus' miracles. We're taking one each week and one from each of the gospels, even though the miracle we'll look at this week is found in three of the four gospels. The real question as we look at these miracles is "What does this mean for our lives today?" because our logical minds can be a bit skeptical of miracles. Last week, I shared advice from author James Adams who said, "Skeptical people might find their lives enriched if they could acquire such a sense of the miraculous in their own experience." I hope you are able to see the miraculous around you in your everyday life. I've found miracles to be more apparent when you are open to them.

Let me remind you of some of the reasons why Jesus performed miracles, or signs, as John calls them in his gospel.

1. To show compassion and meet human need.
2. To affirm his true identity as the Son of God.
3. To provide us with a glimpse of the world that is to come.

While the sign we looked at last week—turning water into wine—is found only in the Gospel of John, today's miracle—the healing of the paralytic—is found in three of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Really, it's only found in two and a half gospels because, while Mark and Luke contain the full story, Matthew edits out entire sections of it. It seems that Matthew's red pen got the best of him when he was looking at Mark's story. Mark is widely understood to be the first gospel written, and Matthew and Luke would have had Mark to use as a template. In fact, 90% of Mark can also be found in Matthew. Today, you heard Luke's version read, and we'll mash together Luke and Mark as we look at this story.

We know from Mark that Jesus had returned to his home base in Capernaum and was teaching in what Mark says was Jesus' home. It says, "When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home" (Mark 2:1). Luke tells us that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law—the Jewish leaders of the day—sitting by along with a lot of other people. This was early enough in Jesus' ministry that these religious leaders were coming to hear from Jesus for themselves in order to determine whether they should accept and encourage him or accuse and condemn him. The place was packed. If there were fire codes, then they would have been in violation.

The word about Jesus was out in the countryside enough that men—Mark tells us four men—brought their paralyzed friend to the house in hopes of a healing. The place was so packed that they could not get in the front door. What now? I have to wonder what kind of conversation transpired at this moment. Did these friends consider waiting until the crowd thinned out? Was one of them ready to pack it up and head home? Did they argue about how they should have tried to get to the house earlier? We don't know. All that we do know is that there was a sense of urgency among this quartet.

They did not know if they would ever have another chance like this. Their backs were against the wall. If they wanted their friend to have this encounter with the miracle worker, this might be their only shot. Eventually someone in the group decided that if they were going to get inside, then they were going to have to get creative. The idea was going to cause a bit of a disruption, but this was their friend and he was worth the risk. "I know," said one of them, "let's cut a hole in the roof!"

Now imagine that you are on the inside of that house. We don't know exactly what Jesus was teaching at that moment, but at some point, the people in the crowd had to start hearing noises above them. They would have glanced at each other with that look that says, "Did you hear that?" Whoever was causing the commotion, it must have sounded like they were tearing things apart up there. Suddenly, a shaft of light broke into the room, and these four men lowered their friend into the middle of the gathering.

The artistic community has done their best to depict this strange event. Likely, the most famous is an 1886 painting by French artist James Tissot.<sup>1</sup> Like some artistic depictions in general, even this painting has been sanitized. There's no drywall dust on the floor from the cutting—or more likely an adobe like mud/straw mixture. None of the three gospels record the crowd's response to this brazen act. No one is recorded as saying, "If you'd have just said, 'Excuse me' we would have moved." Regardless of the response of the crowd, it is the response of Jesus that is important.

Jesus heals the man. Specifically, it says, "When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'" (Luke 5:20). This wording on the part of Jesus was intentional in two ways. First—did you notice?—it was the faith of the friends and not the man's faith. His faith is not mentioned. Secondly, the belief at the time was that only one sent from God could forgive sins. There were lots of miracle workers in Jesus' day, and the religious leaders paid them little attention, but one who forgives sin quickly

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<sup>1</sup> Information on James Tissot painting from Brooklyn Museum website.  
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4504>

aroused the questions of the Pharisees who were there. For these leaders, only God could forgive sin and what Jesus said—“Your sins are forgiven”—was outright blasphemy. Later, Jesus would ask the man to stand up, roll up his mat and go home.

In preaching class, I was taught to not try to tell the congregation everything that’s in a story but to pick one aspect of the story and concentrate on it. Largely, I try to follow that advice, but I’d like to tell you lots of things I see in this story because it’s far more than a story about an impending insurance claim for roof damage and one man getting to carry his stretcher home, as impressive as that is.

While more healings would come, why on earth is it important in this one to cut through the roof to get to Jesus? At the time, there were lots of barriers between people and God. The temple had a progression of spaces so that only the most holy person—the high priest—could go to the holiest space, and then only once a year. In this story, there was a wall around Jesus—a wall of people and walls of a building that kept that separation intact.

But on that day when the roof crumbled, Jesus showed them that God was right there in their midst. No longer was there a separation between God and God's people. No longer did the people need to rely on a mediator to intervene on their behalf. They no longer had to be separated from God by a wall of protectors or a roof. Jesus allowed the roof to crumble to show that our access to him is as readily available as is the person sitting next to you. Even when the power structures crowd you out, Jesus wants you in.

Another thing that strikes me in this story is the way that Jesus responded. Jesus, I think, had a good gift for improvisation. I once heard a story about Wynton Marsalis, the great jazz trumpeter. He was playing a gig one night, and in the middle of one of the songs, someone's cell phone started to ring. Instead of it being a distraction, Marsalis didn't stop, didn't miss a beat. He started playing the ring tone on his trumpet and finally resolved back into the original melody. He made it part of the song.<sup>2</sup>

That's what Jesus did. He turned this interruption into part of the message. He was likely teaching about the kingdom of God. And in the kingdom of God it is often the last ones you'd expect who get counted among the faithful. Here, it's the ones who put the hole in the roof. You are not an interruption to Jesus. You are a part of Jesus' message of grace and forgiveness.

Two more things to note. I told you there is a lot here. How about the fact that friends are important to our faith? It was not only the paralyzed man who believed, but his four friends also believed. The four friends had faith. Jesus saw their faith. Often our friends encourage and enlarge the faith that we have. These four friends were helpers, they were doers, they were action folks who got the job done. These four friends who carried their paralyzed friend on a stretcher were persistent and imaginative to get their friend in front of Jesus. We like their persistence, their perseverance, their doggedness, their imaginative

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<sup>2</sup> Story about Marsalis and idea of interruption found in “When the Roof Crumbles” by The Rev. Reggie Weaver, September 9, 2012 found at [www.day1.org](http://www.day1.org).

spirit. They knew that they needed to get their paralyzed friend into the healing presence of Jesus, and they did it.

Sometimes, we are in a similar situation where we have a friend who needs the healing presence of Jesus. Most often, it is we ourselves who need the healing power of Jesus in our lives, but sometimes, we know it is a friend. Sometimes, we want to get our friends into the presence of Jesus, so Jesus can heal their hearts. Friends are friends when we are sick. Friends are present to help us, and these particular friends proved to be very good supporters. It speaks to the importance of being a part of a community of faith. Sometimes you are the care-giver, sometimes you are the care-receiver.

There is one other intriguing detail that can easily be missed that I want to mention—the paralytic’s mat, his bedroll, his stretcher. Different translations use different words. We are told the man is laying on it, that this mat is lowered down through the roof. That bed roll is the thing that bears the man to Jesus. Jesus specifically includes it in the question he poses to the scribes in Mark. He doesn’t just ask if it is easier to tell the man his sins are forgiven or to “stand up and walk.” No, it is “stand up and take your mat and walk.” The mat is somehow, oddly, right there. Then, the mat appears again when Jesus tells the man to “stand up, take your mat, and go to your home.” And finally, the paralytic did just that, immediately taking his mat with him. That bed roll gets a lot of airtime in just a handful of verses.<sup>3</sup>

It seems like a strange thing to tell a healed person to do—be sure and take your sickbed with you. Why on earth would this healed person want that particular souvenir? It would be like finally getting your cast off after breaking your leg and then insisting on lugging that shell home from the doctor’s office with you or getting released from the hospital and needing to take the hospital bed home with you.

Why is this detail important? Maybe it is just a way of showing that the paralytic is so healed that he can not only walk but he can also pick stuff up and carry it. Or maybe it is just the recognition that this man will still need something to sleep on now that he is mobile again. Or maybe it’s pragmatic—it’s a crowded room, we need the space, get that thing out of here.

But maybe there is more to it than that. Presumably the paralytic’s life would never be the same after that day when he heard the words of forgiveness and stood on his own two feet. He was carried in at the beginning of the story, but now he carries, and carries on. The old life is gone and a new life has begun, that is true. But take your mat with you, Jesus says. Does he mean: Don’t forget where you came from? Does he mean: Bring your testimony with you? That’s what I choose to think. The past is a part of who you are but with Jesus, it no longer controls you.

What do you want to take away from this odd story that has damaged a home in Capernaum? 1. In Jesus Christ, you have direct access to God. It’s why we say all are welcome at this table. It is not my decision or anyone else’s if you can come. You can come, and here you are welcome. 2. You are not an

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<sup>3</sup> Idea of the importance of the mat was new to me and found in a commentary - Commentary on Mark 2:1-22 by Angela Dienhart Hancock, January 12, 2020 found at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org).

interruption to Jesus. You are a part of Jesus' message of grace and forgiveness. 3. The community that surrounds you is important. You are a part of that community. Sometimes you are carrying others and sometimes others are carrying you. 4. Your past is a part of you but doesn't control you. Carry your mat with you—not to define you but to remind you how far you've come. It is a part of who you are but, with Jesus, you look to the future.

I'm thankful for this man who let his friends bring him to Jesus. I'm thankful for his friends who wanted to bring him to Jesus. But most of all, I'm thankful for Jesus—that he welcomed the man just as he welcomes us—forgiving sin and making us whole. Amen.