

At first sight our Gospel reading today is a very simple and straightforward story of the healing of a paralysed man, but as we look at it in more detail we find that it has a much deeper meaning. As usual with Matthew, he just gives the bare bones of a story which is told in a much more interesting way by Mark.

But none of the gospels tell us why this man was paralysed, they don't tell us what condition he was suffering from, it's enough for us to know that he was paralysed and therefore unable to walk. Mark makes clearer than Matthew the amazing faith of the paralysed man's friends. They took the huge risk of destroying the roof of another man's house to get the paralysed man into Jesus' presence - and Jesus eventually responded to that faith with a miraculous healing. Moved by their faith in him, Jesus says to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

The man was probably not expecting to hear Jesus mention his sins. As far as he was concerned, that was not the reason he had come to Jesus. To understand this story we need to note the close links that the people of that time saw between sickness and sin. Sickness was often seen as a punishment for sin, either the sin of the person themselves or of a parent. Remember, in John's gospel, chapter 9, how the people asked Jesus if the man was born blind because of his own sin or the sin of his parents.

In telling the paralysed man that his sins were forgiven Jesus was going to the root of his problem. Matthew certainly isn't saying that the man's paralysis was caused by his sins - he's saying that the paralysed man needed forgiveness of sins more than he needed physical healing. In fact we all need forgiveness of our sins more than we need anything else, because the forgiveness of our sins is our key to eternal life.

Today, we don't see paralysis or any physical handicap as a punishment from God. We don't believe God works like that. On the other hand, it is likely that many health problems can be linked with a disharmony in our lives arising from a conflict between what we are truly meant to be and what we tend to be. We refer to some sicknesses as 'dis-eases'. They are the result of harmful stress when we are out of harmony with ourselves, with other people and with our environment. In that sense, we can see a clear link between sin and sickness.

Perhaps if we looked at our own lives we might see that some of our physical and mental ailments are due to a lack of harmony between God and others and

our surroundings. Let's think about that in the days ahead and try to draw closer to God so that we may become the people God's made us to be.

Then there are those friends who brought the paralysed man to Jesus. They brought him because he couldn't make it under his own steam! They must have been very special friends for as we heard earlier, they risked the wrath of the homeowner by making a large hole in his roof! But this isn't the only instance of others bringing those in need to Jesus for healing.

In Luke 4 verse 40 we hear that "As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them." In Mark 8 verses 22-26, we hear the story of the blind man who was cured at Bethsaida, "Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him." And in our Gospel today, verse two, we hear that some people brought a paralysed man on a mat to Jesus.

The people could have been bringing this man to Jesus because he was a part of their village and they cared for his well-being. On the other hand they could have really wanted to see the miracles of Jesus for themselves. No matter their motive, they had confidence that Jesus would be able to do a great work for this man.

We know that there was no way for the man to get to Jesus by himself. We know he was paralysed but he may also have lacked the faith to believe that Jesus could actually do anything for him. Here we find encouragement for all of those who are weak in faith. Like the paralysed man, there will be moments in our lives when we will find ourselves spiritually hurting or in need of healing. We may lack the faith to believe that Jesus can do anything for us, so we question, "why would he care for me?". Similar to the paralysed man, we often need the help of those around us to carry us to the Saviour through prayer and faith.

Sometimes, I think when we hear important messages such as this we tell ourselves that it doesn't apply to me it is for the person sitting next to me. But this applies to each one of us, to you and to me. How will our friends, our families, those in our communities come to know the saving, healing love of Christ if we don't help bring them to him?

Our faith is not always strong enough to get us to Christ on our own, but through the encouragement and faithful pursuit of other Christians, we can find ourselves at the feet of Christ ready to receive His healing touch. 2 Corinthians

12 verses 9-10 tell us, “When we are weak, He is strong and will renew our faith to believe in Him again.”

We are also reminded by this account that Jesus knows our hurts and meets us where we are. He will not stretch our faith more than we can handle, but will tend to our wounds as he reveals more of himself to us.

Finally I want to leave you with another verse from Matthew, chapter 15 verse 30, “And large crowds came to him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and he healed them.” In Jesus’ name. Amen.