

*Texts: Mark 2:1-22*

*Subject: Jesus heals a Man Paralyzed*

*Theme: Something New*

*1 Epiphany; Jan. 12, 2020, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,  
Amen.

Christmas morning was the usual ruckus around our house. No travels this year, just a joyful time to be together and enjoy the holiday. Ivy made fresh scones and bacon, there were mimosas and sparkling juice, our family tradition. But first - the presents! Four kids waited with excitement for their turn to open something new. They went youngest to oldest - yes they took turns - we keep it very orderly. Then, restraint gave way to celebration - each one *amazed* at receiving a new gift! Some favorites this year: rainbow high top Converse shoes, Pokemon Sword and Shield, a handheld video game, and the Paw Patrol Lookout Tower! We grownups made mental notes of the joy on their faces, and will try to recall them when life gets more complicated. And it will. The day after, mom went to work, and we cleaned up the packages, straightened the closets, and found homes for new toys, books, and clothes. The decorations and lights are all down now. As the weeks passed, we got back into the routines, back to life, back to the ups and downs of everyday. What happened to that amazement? Where did it go?

Maybe just getting through the holiday was enough for some of you. And now, it's a new month, year, decade. It's also new season in the church - we call it epiphany - the time when Christ was revealed to the nations. The Son of God - the Word made flesh is in time and history. The magi came and brought gifts to the newborn king - tradition remembers three of them, and the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but there may have

been more. They were amazed to hear of the birth and had to go and see the baby and the family there in Bethlehem. Then they went back to their homes, back to their routines, back to watching the stars.

So we embark on a new year together. What will be new for us? Who will be born in the coming months? What will give us hope? Where will we find healing in our bodies, in our homes, in our nation? How will we be amazed by Jesus?

We're into Mark's Gospel now, and this first good news story moves quickly. Are you ready for the journey? Read along with us and you'll see what I mean. We hear of the crowds that came to Capernaum. Jesus was living there, and as was the custom, if the door was open, people would find you. They'd gathered in the house to see Jesus. There were so many, it was standing room only. They'd heard about the leper and maybe others who were healed in Galilee. They filled the house to hear Jesus preach the Word of God, when all of a sudden there was some scratching at the roof, and a hole opened up - it was made of dried mud and branches. Some friends began lowering a guy in on a mat - he was paralyzed. Jesus says right then and there - "Son, your sins are forgiven." It might be what we expect from Jesus, the Son of God and all, but to them it was strange, offensive even - rabbis didn't do that. *Only God could forgive sins.* This was controversial. But before they can run Him out of town Jesus speaks up - not only forgiving sins, but telling this paralyzed man to get up, take his mat, and go home. And he does. He stands up. This one who was carried into the room, now bends over to pick up the mat, and carry it out - fully healed.

What did he do to deserve that?

Mark says that Jesus noticed the faith of his friends. The man had nothing to do with this - we can imagine maybe he's one who's given up on being healed, maybe he's been like this too long, suffered indignity and abuse. He's been blamed for bringing the problem on himself, or his parents took the blame - they must have been sinners. This was the understanding. Upon meeting Jesus of Nazareth, he's not only healed but forgiven! Everything is new!

I want to imagine he took that mat - it was a symbol of his old life - and everywhere he went he showed it to people. Like a kid showing off their new Christmas gift! Maybe he gave talks to the youth group in the synagogue, and told how Jesus changed his life, how he once was unable to move, and with a little help from his friends, he found a new life. And everyone who heard it would have been amazed.

But it's scandalous for Jesus - while the people give glory to God - the Pharisees and scribes look at him funny. "Just who does this guy think he is?"

A good question.

The gifts have been unwrapped and the decorations taken down. The nativity set will be put away, but Jesus remains with us. He doesn't stay here in the church for you to come find him Sunday morning. He's out there on the journey - the Word is alive and moving, and active, and healing, and bringing new life. What will this newness look like for us? For you? What will make us amazed?

If you've lived a lot of years, and think you know what to expect, or if you've just entered the middle stage of life, or looking at retirement, you are still here. You still have a chance to be amazed. You may yet see something new.

New things happen when we gather together. When we share faith, when we get around this table and meet Jesus in bread and wine. New things happen when we gather in homes and hear the voices and insights of one another, when we listen to our neighbors and learn to serve them in new ways. New things happen when we partner with agencies and organizations to make a difference here in our city. Could you imagine new transportation on Maryland parkway - a rapid bus lane from UNLV to Fremont street? How would that change our community? Can you imagine a new high school, a new K-8 school here on our street, or a new magnet program, bring new families to our historic neighborhood? Can you envision, parents and children meeting in this church to learn and build relationships, to find hope and healing in Jesus with all of us here?

Could we be amazed?

I think of those friends who carried a man, unable to use his legs, unable to work, unable to live in safety, to provide for himself, and what it must have meant that they would even make the effort to bring him to the house. When they found they couldn't get in the door, they didn't give up. They didn't leave him there and say, "well it was a good idea. We're try another time." No. They found a way. They put in the work to get him to the roof. They dug a hole through the structure (I'm sure they patched it up, too) big enough to lower him down to see Jesus. And they didn't go away empty handed. Their faith was confirmed too. They had trusted that this could happen. They believed in him. They were not going to miss the chance to see something new.

Jesus forgives sins. There were others who performed healing works. Jesus did that too, but none of them would dare to pronounce that you were forgiven of your

failures, your faults, and all your mistakes. No temple, no sacrifice, no works of penance - just forgiven. *No sin's too big, no faith too small.* Jesus is the only one who does that.

Now that he's got their attention, Jesus is not content to just go house to house and be a fine preacher. There's more. This Jesus has been hanging out with the wrong crowd. Levi was like *Don Fanucci* - that guy in the Godfather II who goes around extorting business owners and collecting protection money. "He just wants to wet his beak a little." He always wants a little more - only this was worse - tax collectors worked for the empire. Anything they could get off the top they'd keep. If you saw them you'd cross the street to get away from them. But Jesus talks to Levi - he calls him to be one of his followers, one of his friends. There were sinners and tax collectors were at his table too - people who flaunted the law, just did whatever they wanted. They ate while the Pharisees and scribes fasted - even John's disciples refrained from eating on fasting days to show their holiness.

Jesus doesn't care about that. He came to heal the sick. He came to call *all* people to him. The ones we think are the wrong ones, the ones we don't really want to sit next to, the ones who make us frustrated, the ones who might have hurt us, and hurt others, the ones who are hurt themselves. He calls them his friends, he calls them to the table, he calls them to follow him, to be amazed and give glory to God. he calls each and every one of us. He calls us to believe that He *is* the healing and hope of the world, and something new that we need here and now.

Will you come? Will you believe?

Will you watch and see what Jesus will do this year in you and through you? Will you bring friends who are in deep need of this good news?

Jesus is life and healing, Jesus is food for the hungry, Jesus is our friend, our Lord, our Savior. Jesus is here to love you, to heal you, to forgive you. To make you something new.

Amen.