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Ev.-luth. KG Bokeloh, Im Büchenorte 3, 31515 Wunstorf

Date: 2009 / 10 / 18
Church: Ev.-luth. Petrikirche, Hannover
Text: Mk 2, 1-12
Topic: “Bearable solutions”

Bokeloh, den 19. Oktober 2009

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Sprechzeiten nach Verabredung
und Mittwoch 16:00-18:00h

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Imagine lying there, not being able to move, in pains, bearing the staring of others. Imagine standing next to the bed, not being able to actually do something, to ease the pain of the sick. – In both circumstances we feel helpless, powerless to essentially change anything. Those of you who care for a close friend or a relative have borne such burdens. The closer we feel to the sick, the closer the suffering gets to us. We try so hard to find solutions that will help, that will lift the pain for a short while at least. Many take upon themselves unbelievable ways and means to find a workable solution; they search the internet, speak to doctors who have been recommended to them, sign up for long-standing therapies, the latest development in the medical field, unusual healing methods. Each day brings new hope and disappointments! Ups and downs, day in, day out! What a blessing, if you are not alone in such a painful, almost unbearable situation, if there are friends and family who come close and stay close, who comfort and strengthen, who help you carry the burden to the very end because they care. To accept sickness as a common task as spouses, as family, as friends, carries all involved further – beyond what they could bear by themselves.

Surprisingly enough, we do not learn whether it is friends or family who care so much about the paralytic that they hear of another chance, they lift him yet once more and carry him out of the house on his mat. The decisive factor is: they care (!), care enough to carry on. They are moved to move on, despite all the hardship and disappointment that they might have been through already. They are not discouraged to the point of giving up. They have heard that there is somebody in town who is an eloquent preacher who makes his listeners wonder. They have heard that he has also healed many. On this very day, so many people want to listen to his teaching that the house is overcrowded. Even around the house the place is packed. Those four friends do not give up, they keep on searching for an unusual way to achieve their purpose. They take further difficulties upon themselves, and detours, to fulfil their goal. They do not want to miss out on this opportunity, on perhaps the last chance, just because of the stares on the onlookers. Because of all the whispering and the gossip of the bystanders. So they carry their precious burden to the top of the roof and begin to take off the thatching – enough so that the opening is big enough to lower the mat through the ceiling – right at Jesus’ feet. And yet, Jesus still looks at them first! He lifts his eyes to the ceiling and comments on their faith in his power. And only then, with rather surprising words, addresses to the paralytic lying helpless before him: “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

How would you have reacted if you were one of the four companions? If you were the paralytic? “Excuse me, you miss the point here! Can’t you realize what’s really at stake? Don’t you see that I can’t move? It is obvious what the problem really is!” -

Much advice which is given to us by a doctor or a friend seems – at first – to miss the point of what we feel we need right now! Many a counsel or a word of guidance addressed to us sounds unreasonable at first – especially if it goes against our expectations, appears not to fulfil our requirements. Only if we trust that friend, have confidence that he or she means well, we will not dismiss such words as unfitting, but take it upon ourselves to re-think them. Thereby, first disappointments can turn into thankfulness for the love and care that were behind it all.

The thoughts and feelings of the four companions nor of the paralytic are of any interest to Mark right now. He is more concerned with helping us to understand the general reaction to this provocative statement: “Son, your sins are forgiven.” – “Who can forgive sins but God alone? This preacher acts as if he were God! This is blasphemy!” In view of

such a claim one almost loses sight of the paralytic at his feet. This is a mighty question with powerful consequences: the authority of God is at stake! As God's representative, Jesus claims the right to forgive sins and demonstrates his authority to do so by also enabling the paralytic to get up. The very thing that carried him here, he takes up to carry it home! We can hardly imagine the tension, especially for the paralytic: Would he be able to move, would he be the one to show that Jesus was right? Whose hopes would be destroyed if this therapy does not show any effect, if healing does not occur? It was not a case of days and weeks of painfully watching the effects of the new pills, the new therapy... but a matter of seconds, so that all could see its result.

"He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all." Those are the few words that Mark uses to succinctly portray what happened. None of the onlookers and bystanders would leave that place unmoved! None of them would have ever experienced anything like that. Today, people would have immediately taken out their cell phones, taken photos, published the news on their blogs or spread the word through twitter. In those days, word of mouth propaganda was effective enough that people began to follow Him who had thus proven His authority over sin and sickness.

An – almost – unbelievable result for the paralytic and his companions, if it had not been for their trust that made them move in the first place. Their hopes and expectations had not failed them. They had found a trustworthy solution for the imminent, visible problem – and much more than that. They had put their trust in Him who had been sent by God to fulfil the hopes of the people in a world of suffering, whilst pointing to a world without pain and tears, sickness and death. He amply demonstrated that he was – and is - entitled to speak like that – with divine authority.

Lying there, not being able to move, in pain, bearing the looks / staring of others. Standing next to the bed, not being able to actually do something, to feel the pain of the sick. – In both circumstances we feel helpless, powerless to essentially do anything about it. How wonderful would it be, if a miracle happened in any of those situations, just like Mark tells us happened for the paralytic. But maybe we would actually not treasure it any greater if it were part of our everyday life. Maybe we would take it for granted. How wonderful, if the new world to come could have already begun, that Jesus demonstrates to us in His signs and wonders! Surely, we would have long forgotten what wears us down and burdens us today. This magnificent miracle is still to take come!

Therefore, I would like to focus again on those four companions, who are so moved by the suffering of a loved one that they take action:

They cared, they took the initiative. Alone, or just two of them, even three, would not have been enough to the shoulder the responsibility. Between the four of them, they were successful. Where do we find faithful companions who help us carry the load? Whom do we confide in to strengthen our confidence?

They looked for help, and made use of the opportunity that opened up. We can ask ourselves: Whose experience could help us in our situation? Who gives us trustworthy advice?

They did not give up, nor were they easily discouraged when difficulties came their way. They kept looking for creative solutions and innovative ways, and kept focussed on their goal. Their commitment to the task enabled them to invent practical solutions. All in all, it was made possible because they could trust each other and they actively put their trust in HIM of whom they had heard. They had the courage to carry out their plan and, in doing so, learned about the greater plan that God has mind for us. Sometimes, it is the small steps that help us move on, day by day, until we find ourselves on the road to a much bigger destination.

"You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life." This is how Cicely Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement in Europe, describes her ideal of faithful companionship when people care about each other to the very end. "You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life." It is often the small practical steps, the tiny gestures of care, the careful chosen words of comfort, the silence that speaks loudest; to actually fulfil a wild wish, a crazy idea, to share the fond memories of it together, time to put our relationships in order and to bridge the gulf of questions between us. It is this conscious decision to care about one another in such a caring way that makes life worth living. And yet, as harsh as it may sound, it is eventually worthless, if we do not have a hope that carries us beyond it all and enables us to show that kind of care and to continue in the face of suffering and sorrow.

Strangely enough, it is often the times of sickness of a close friend or relative, the sudden death of a neighbour or colleague that forces us to refocus on these values. It is then that we begin to treasure the gift of life, the miracle of every day health, of unbroken companionship and trustworthy friendship anew. However, we still suffer and die despite the support of family and friends. And it is heartbreaking if there is no hope of being reunited with them after death!

Strangely enough, it is often the times of sickness of a close friend or relative, the sudden death of a neighbour or colleague that we begin to value the miraculous promises that God gives us in Jesus, our trustworthy companion, and more than that He is our true healer and comforter. As companions to one another we can only portray mere reflections of his eternal friendship that carries us through life and death and beyond! For He is the only one who walked the road before us – and for us.

May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.