



A weekly reflection by members of the Precious Blood Community

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“Yet, on this day, I experienced love, forgiveness and a command to break barriers”.

For my reflection, I would like to share a piece I wrote as an undergraduate student based on Mark 2: 1-12. I first shared it as an undergraduate student at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois. You likely recall this gospel story when Jesus and a paralytic meet. ([Here's a link](#) if you want to reread it.) Off the top of your head, what do you recall about that encounter?

If you are like most people, what you recall is some trusty nondisabled friends lowering the paralytic through a roof and Jesus telling the man to walk.

Growing up, every single reflection that I heard on that passage focused either on those dependable friends or on the man's sudden ambulation. Every single reflection.

But, when I hear that Gospel passage, I hear something different. I am a person who cannot walk and who uses a wheelchair. I am a person who encounters obstacles to physical access at restaurants, health care appointments, parks, city sidewalks, and yes, including places of worship. Even places that have physical access often have it blocked with trash cans or carts or bicycles.

I can identify with really wanting to go somewhere and needing to figure out how to do it. I can identify with Jesus forgiving my sins.

Below is my reflection where I place myself in the paralytic's shoes. Putting myself in the paralytic's "shoes." as you absorb this perspective, what do you hear? What images come to mind? In what ways are they different than what you expected? Do you think any differently about the characters in this passage?

The Point of View of the Paralytic

What a day! What an experience! I am still trying to make sense of the day.

I had heard that Jesus of Nazareth was returning to Capernaum. Like so many in town, I really wanted to hear what he had to say. I had heard much about him – controversial, barrier-breaking, loving – a prophet in our times. My family, my friends and I excitedly talked about going to hear this Jesus.

The logistics were challenging. We had to figure out how I could get down the stone steps. I decided to leave my wheels at home and use a mattress so that it would be easier to be lifted through the doorway. We left very early so that there would be plenty of time to navigate the challenges of the city. However, we underestimated the crowds and the traffic and arrived just as Jesus was beginning to speak.

The hustle and bustle were incredible. Lots of pushing and shoving, and frankly, rudeness, as some elbowed their way to get close. We tried to get in through the door, but as I had expected, it was impossible. A hot, smelly, noisy mob scene!

This happens all time – so, we tried some of the things we usually try. First, we looked for a back entrance. But that was crowded and blocked as well. We returned to the front entrance and asserted ourselves. I said, “excuse me”; my sister said, “excuse me”; a kind stranger said, “clear the way!” – but to no avail. We just couldn’t get in. Some people ignored us, some people gave us dirty looks, and some people just cut in front of us to make sure they got closer. We could hear Jesus a bit through the din of the crowd but could not make out what he was saying.

So, now what to do? We *all* really wanted to hear Jesus. But it didn’t seem possible. I suggested that my friends and family squeeze through the door without me. They could stand in the back and listen, and later share with me what Jesus said.

My friend said, “No way!” “We’re in this together!” My sister said she had been checking the roof and thought it would be possible to break through and enter that way. My wife said, “Yeah, let’s go for it. You know that, yet again, we will have to break a few rules — but we can do it.”

My initial reaction was not enthusiastic; it had already been a long day just to get this far. And the heat was overwhelming. The roof?! No way! That would draw attention and create a scene! I would be seen as a poor pitiful man who could not be independent! I really just wanted to be in the back and inconspicuously listen to this prophet’s words.

But...it was making a grand entrance or miss out. I could think of no other way.

So, I agreed. My friends, family, and a few helpful strangers opened the roof and lowered me down on my mattress.

Sure enough, Jesus and the entire crowd turned and looked at me with penetrating curious stares. I felt, once again, like a circus freak. And, I was not in the mood for that this day. People in the crowd looked at me, and then back at Jesus. The room became quiet, as people waited for the explosion of anger or pity that they thought would come from Jesus.

His response surprised not only them but me too.

Jesus smiled.

“Well done!” he said to us. “You all showed tremendous creativity and ingenuity to get inside. If only we could all be as creative, tenacious, and compassionate. We would work together to break down the barriers that divide us.”

The room was silent.

Then Jesus did something else that surprised me. He came over to me, laid his hand on me, and said “Child, your sins are forgiven.” It was as if Jesus had known about the unkind words I had shouted at my loved ones. My soul calmed and I was at peace. I was loved. My sins were behind me now.

Jesus turned to the friends, family, and strangers who had helped me gain access, and to each one, said the same words, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” Their faces and bodies also showed the embrace of the love of God.

Eventually, I came back to the commotion of the room.

The crowd was pestering Jesus, saying that he should not have forgiven our sins. They said he was blaspheming.

I was accustomed to intrusive crowds. I was not going to let this one ruin my intimate encounter with God. I was still living in a deep moment of love and peace. Jesus’ voice sounded distant as he addressed his critics. He said something about, “which is easier – forgiving sins or walking?”

Then, he told me to rise, pick up my mat, and go home.

What?!

I didn’t come for a cure. I came to hear the preaching of Jesus. Yet, on this day, I experienced love, forgiveness, and a command to break barriers.

It felt odd to be used as an example. I am not sure I like it. I don’t want to be portrayed as some kind of wonder patient, the miracle man.

Plus, now I have to adjust to a new physical body, a new lifestyle. I knew I would have much to reflect on about this day.

I wanted to hear more of Jesus’ word that day, particularly his words about breaking boundaries. I wanted to follow him and be his disciple. But, I trusted my God and left with my group amid some awkward stares from the crowd. I guess we all will have to be disciples in our own communities.

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and a Graduate Student of Intercultural Ministry at the Catholic Theological Union.*

This weekly reflection is made available to all who are part of our Precious Blood family. Feel free to share it with others. Would you be willing to write a reflection? If so, please contact Vicky Otto at votto@pbspiritualityinstitute.org