

SERMON OF DR. STEVEN P. EASON

“Tear Open the Roof!”

January 14, 2018

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Isaiah 43: 15-21

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ —he said to the paralytic— ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’ And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’

Mark 2: 1-12

This story is about Jesus healing someone, but it is also about four people doing something really out of the box. They intentionally tore off the roof of Jesus’ house. We aren’t given their names. We don’t know anything about them. We don’t know how or when Jesus had such an impact upon their lives that they would do such a thing. They are nameless instruments of God’s grace. Jesus heals the man, but these four people got him there.

Somebody had to come up with the plan. Somebody had to know that Jesus could do something in this man’s life. They cared enough about their friend to rearrange their schedules and take on some inconvenience. They had to pick this guy up (*We’ll call him Henry!*) and physically put him in an environment that could change his life.

Using some biblical imagination, one of those four was probably a *Methodist*, one was a *Baptist*, another one was *Episcopalian*, and there had to be a *Presbyterian!* When they couldn’t

get Henry into Jesus' house, they had several options: 'The *Methodist* could have said, *'Let's put him down outside the door and attach a note to him. When Jesus comes out maybe he'll heal him.'* (Methodists move around so much she probably couldn't stay!)

The *Baptist* could have said; *'If we just had enough water we could baptize him and that would take care of it. And make sure he tithes, comes to Sunday School every week...and no dancing!'*

The *Episcopalian* could have pulled out the Prayer Book and looked up a prayer for; *'What to Pray When You Can't Get Somebody in to See Jesus.'* *It's on page 287!*) And you know what the *Presbyterian* did. He recommended they form a committee to study paralysis!

What they did do was tear open the roof. They crawled up on top of Jesus' house and... . . . *removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.* (Mark 2:4)

Many of you have been to Capernaum and seen the foundation of this very house. It was small. The mud, the thatch, the debris would have fallen on everybody. It was a mess. A huge interruption! I'm not sure I would have thought to tear off the roof, but they weren't about to wait. The time was now.

Sometimes you have to tear off the roof. You have to remove the obstacles. Now is the time for something to happen. Now is the time to act. It's time for the paralysis to end. Sometimes God uses us as a part of that healing process. What a privilege that is.

There is a lot of paralysis in the world. Folks are paralyzed physically and spiritually.

- *addictions*
- *illness*
- *unresolved anger*
- *the lack of forgiveness*
- *a thirst for power*
- *a painful marriage*
- *homelessness*
- *depression*
- *loneliness*
- *racism*
- *classism*
- *sexism*
- *unemployment, or a job you hate*
- *materialism*
- *And in our current culture, there is a growing sense of "nihilism." From the Latin, "nihil," or nothing. It is the rejection of all religious and moral principles. That's a form of paralysis.*

So what's the role of the Church in all this? Are we to be the *moral policeman* for the world? Are we to prescribe rules and regulations for the world to follow? I don't think giving Henry a list of rules would have helped him much.

Or maybe the role of the Church is to be a *chaplain*, to administer comfort to the hurts and pains of the world. Henry's four friends were not about making him more comfortable in his paralysis. They wanted change! Mere *charity* would not have helped Henry either. They could have given him some food and a coat, and hoped he had a good holiday, but he would have still been paralyzed.

What is the Christian response to the various forms of paralysis? These four people took Henry to Christ. Don't let me over-simplify this. We know that not everybody gets healed of every physical disease. But if human brokenness is healed in Christ, if that's true, then the role of the Church may be to pick people up and carry them to Him, to Christ.

Many churches, of all denominations, are declining in membership and financial support. Eighty-six percent of all Presbyterian (USA) churches have 200 or less members, and are aging. We lose 50% of all first time call pastors in their first 5 years. Why? Could it be because we have lost our purpose? Have we become a "*religious cruise ship*?" Lots of activities, staff and programs, but to what end? What is our real purpose here? These four were clear as to what end. This man's life was changed by Christ.

It says Jesus saw their **faith**. The focus was not on the destruction of the roof, or on the paralysis. The focus was on transformation and change. We can focus on what's wrong, or we can get clear about what's right. Jesus saw their faith.

The writer of Hebrews defines faith as "*...is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" (Hebrews 11:1) So faith is not wishful thinking. It's not intellectual assent to a body of doctrine. It's not piety or manipulating God. "*If I have enough faith, maybe I can get God to do this or that.*" That's not faith.

Faith is knowing something, like you know you are sitting here, but that something is not yet here and that something is not yet even seen. That's faith. And faith is a gift from God, not something we conjure up ourselves. These four people didn't leave Henry outside the door. They didn't give him a book of rules. They didn't study paralysis. They did something out of the box. They tore off the roof of Jesus' house. And Jesus saw their faith.

It may be time for this church to tear off some roofs. The world we live in needs that kind of church.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Congregation: **Amen**

This transcript has not been read or edited by Dr. Steven P. Eason.