



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

760 East Broad Street • Columbus Ohio 43205 • (614) 221-6552 • fax (614) 221-5722 • www.bspc.org

“Love That Carries”

Mark 2:1-12

March 12, 2017

Reverend Amy Miracle
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, OH

This morning, we begin a five-week series focusing on passages that were identified by you, the congregation. You may remember this past summer we asked you to share with us a favorite story from the Bible. Here's the thing. Only four of you responded. Lent has more than four Sundays. So today I chose my favorite story from the Bible. At least it was my favorite story 25 years ago. It's the passage I choose for my service of ordination. It was a very important day for me – the day I became a minister of word and sacrament in the Presbyterian Church USA. Becoming ordained was the fulfillment of a long-held dream; a response to a deeply felt call.

At the time, I was living and working and serving as an elder in a small Presbyterian Church on New York City's Upper East Side. The congregation consisted of a group of elderly Eastern Europeans, a few middle-aged folks and lots of young adults – seminarians, artists, law students, musicians. It was an exciting and chaotic place. The community was edgy, creative, committed to social justice issues in this chronically underfunded, ministry-by-duct-tape-and-lots-of-coffee-kind of way. I loved it. I just loved it.

A lot has happened in 25 years. Once again I find myself serving in a church that I love but this place is a lot different than that NYC congregation: wiser, more grounded, immensely more stable. We don't do duct tape. And I'm different than I was a quarter century ago. I drink a lot less coffee now.

So, is this still my favorite story from the Bible? I read it through a few times. We looked at it in Wednesday morning Bible study. And, I still really, really like this passage. This morning I have the great privilege of sharing this story with all of you but, above all, with this year's confirmation class.

The star of the show of this story is the friends. The man on the mat has people. We don't know much about them. They aren't the disciples. They aren't the designated leadership. They must really like the guy on the mat and I'm guessing that they are tired of taking care of him. So, they make the extraordinary decision to make his wholeness their business.

Perhaps they heard rumors about Jesus – about his power to heal. So the four load up their friend one more time and head over to where Jesus is said to be that day.

The friends face a huge obstacle when they arrive at the home where Jesus is teaching. The room is full; the door is blocked.

I wonder how many plans they come up with and abandon before settling on the rooftop scheme. Their strategy isn't without risk. Even though roofs in the ancient world are easier to dismantle than our modern ones, it is not customary to enter a home through the ceiling. That's what doors are used for. The amazing thing is that their plan works. Those four pool their intelligence and creativity and determination and they find an unconventional way to place their friend before Jesus.

More sermons can be found online at <http://bspc.org/AboutUs/SundayMorning/Sermons.aspx>

Sometimes you have to take the roof off. I have a friend and colleague who was serving a church when the roof came off. Literally. A tornado ripped through the town and took the roof off. It was shocking. It was hard. And, she claims, it was the beginning of a lot of good things for that church. Before the tornado, the congregation was kind of stuck. But after the tornado, they had to work as a team, get creative and resourceful. It was the beginning of seeing a bigger picture, the beginning of something new and real. In retrospect, the roof coming off was the best thing that happened to that church.

Sometimes you have to take the roof off. Sometimes small change isn't good enough. Sometimes we need to do things in a radically new way – be undaunted by conventional wisdom – be willing to dismantle the roof if that's what it takes to bring people to the healing power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Confirmation class, I hope and pray that you will become dismantlers of roofs – in service of the healing of those you love, in service of the healing of that which you love. I hope you love the church. I hope you love the church because we do need and will need your courage and your energy and your resilience. I hope you love the world. It could use people committed to its repair, people willing to think creatively, try new things, risk something big for something good.

But, let's think for a minute about the owner of the house. How do you think he responds to having his roof dismantled? I don't think he praises the friends' creativity and grit. He may yell at them. He may call them names – reckless, inconsiderate, foolish, destructive.

You don't always get thanked for dismantling the roof.

That's one of many reasons you don't do this work alone. Life with God is a team sport.

I knew that in my twenties. I know that now. There were a few times in those middle years when I forgot that. And, it didn't work. It didn't work. Whenever I started thinking “this is my burden to carry alone,” the wheels started coming off the bus. That kind of thinking leads to isolation and failure. Any work of healing and transformation is a group activity.

Life with God is a team sport. Reading your statement of faith, I think you get that. Right now we are your team. Whether you see us that way or not. We are your team. We are here for you. I realize that you may not always be living in Columbus, but the church will be just about anywhere you end up. As I told last year's confirmation class, we have a franchise everywhere.

And that's important – more important than you may realize now because, sooner or later, you will be the person on the mat. We all spend time as the paralyzed one – the one in need of help, support, healing.

Someday you will find yourself facing challenges that you never imagined or anticipated. You may go from being a big fish in a little pond to being a little fish in a big pond. The one you love may not love you back. You may struggle to find a job. You may face the illness of someone in your family. You may find yourself alone, afraid, uncertain, paralyzed in some way.

Her 36-year-old sister was dying of the same disease that had killed her mother the year before. “I have nothing left,” she told me. “I can't pray. I come to worship but I don't feel anything. I'm just going through the motions.” And then it came to me, this image of the four men carrying their paralyzed friend. “You don't have to pray. Others will pray for you. We will pray for you. Let us carry you,” I told her. “Let us carry you.”

Sometimes we have the privilege and responsibility to be the love that carries others. Sometimes we have to let others carry us – to let love carry us.

Think of the ones who have carried you this far: parents, grandparents, siblings, strangers, coaches, teachers, friends. They have been mat-bearers for you. Today we give thanks to God for all who have shaped us and loved us and carried us.

This carrying each other – it’s what Jesus calls faith. It’s one of my favorite parts of the passage. Jesus observes what this collection of people do for their friend and the text says “when he saw their faith,” he proceeds to heal the man on the mat.

What is this thing that he sees and calls faith? In this passage, according to Jesus, it’s not believing in certain things. It’s not signing on to certain statements about God. What Jesus calls faith is love in action – it’s carrying your friend for miles on the off chance that he can be healed. Faith is dismantling a roof. It’s linking our welfare to the welfare of another. Faith is loyalty and commitment and courage and compassion and hope. Faith is gritty. Tangible. Real.

So, 2017 Confirmands, go out into the world and be faithful, dismantle a roof or two, make other people’s wholeness your business, be the love that carries others, and, when it’s needed, allow others to carry you.

Amen.