

When you think about your health, what do you fear most ?

Its likely that you will say: loosing my independence. Loosing our independence is the fear I hear most often. Some are terrified at the thought of letting someone else touch them, help them. Yet we must embrace the help, lest we increase everyone's misery including our own.

At my age I can start to feel the changes. I never had to ask for help with simple things, I was the one who was asked to give help. My aunt Gerda, who was vision impaired would say to me when I was a young adult: Eli child, lend me your eyes....and I would read a label, or thread a needle for her. When did the turnaround begin? Slowly...sometimes my wrists feel arthritic and I have to ask for help with opening a jar. My eyes have long not been able to see up close without glasses. Asking for help with cleaning the house was a big step; but necessary for me.

How have you learnt to ask for help? Perhaps you are thinking now of the first time you needed help with loading firewood. Or with changing a light bulb because it was not safe to climb on a stool any more. Or with shopping because you could no longer carry the bags. And then there the big things we fear that still might come. The milestone when the doctor says: "you should not be driving anymore."

That means so much dependence. That can mean so many losses. One of the tools people are given is some form of independence assessment questionnaire every nurse here would be familiar with.

Now Imagine that man on the stretcher in the gospel you heard.

Imagine him being assessed:

Walking: Can the individual move about with or without devices or help from another person?

Transferring: Can he change positions from bed to chair to toilet without assistance?

Can the individual get to the bathroom, prepare hot water get into tub or shower and wash unassisted?

Can the individual dress without assistance, put on artificial limbs or braces perform grooming tasks such as washing or shaving?

Food Can the individual prepare and plan meals and also do the necessary grocery shopping?

Eating: Can he feed himself?

Toileting: Can he get to the bathroom and use all of the facilities?

All these answers would have been "no".

Orientation: Is he acutely aware of places, people, days and years? -yes? perhaps

Communication: Can the individual make needs and desires known by any appropriate means of communication? We dont know

Decision making: Can the individual make appropriate choices? -we dont know...

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The man on the stretcher is in need of 24 hr round the clock care.

Utterly vulnerable.

How does a questionnaire like that make you feel? Vulnerable?

Lets go further into the story...

The house where Jesus is staying is not accessible to the man. The town of Capernaum has 1500 residents. It sounds like a huge crowd is blocking the entrance to where the doctor is.

Excluded.

But then we hear that he is not alone. A group of friends is with the man.

What kind of people are they?

They can't be the people who say things like: "Here are so many others who have a life still ahead of them. Let them be first." Or who think: "He may not know it but the man's life is over. Lets not bother." Or: "I cant stand the sight of him. I remember how fit he used to be. I just cant stand being with him any more."

None of this for the man's friends. They've stayed by his side. They've carried him here. They are determined to do something for him. That Jesus is good they have heard. A good doctor, a real healer. Buddy must see him. So how do we get buddy in? We need to get creative. If not through the door then through the roof! Wow.

Maybe, on an aside, we need to reconsider our accessibility here at St G&A. The solution to getting folks in chairs into the downstairs wont be simple, It will be costly in all likelihood. But ...I mean think of that! Where there is a will there is a way. And at least we won't have to take off our roof! But in Capernaum thats where the solution was: The friends uncover the tiles and let their friend right down in front of the attending physician.

There is ample good news right here isnt there? What wonderful friends to have. Maybe he never knew how much they cared for him until this bad paralysis happened to him. And Mark tells us: When Jesus saw their trust, he said to the man, your sins are forgiven! Their faith...their trust! The man did not have to do anything. Jesus was not interested in probing the man and searching for the cause or his fault in becoming paralyzed. Jesus accepted and loved what the friends did , responded to their determination by embracing him completely as a person; offering forgiveness, wholeness, healing .

Do you find it odd that Jesus would say " your sins are forgiven"?

In order to understand what is happening here, imagine what humans tend to do. Blame the victim for its misfortune. Why? Its scary when a neighbour gets sick or disabled. Humans want to believe that *"something like that would not happen to me... if only I was careful, or ate well, or was a good person, or paid attention while driving etc...if only I did everything right"*.

This thinking gives us the illusion of control. And so in Jesus time everyone thought that illness was the result of unresolved sin or wrongdoing on the person's part. Maybe the sick person could not remember or was not conscious of what the problem was, but God would now, they assumed.

This is why Jesus turns to the man and says first thing: "your sins are forgiven". As far as God is concerned, there is nothing in the way of you getting well. So Jesus sets the man free from his worrying, (*what did I do wrong to deserve this?*) "Your

sins are forgiven"...that stands for: "You are accepted, loved..restored...in God's eyes you are whole."

The physical cure "take your mat and walk!" then in 1st century people's worldview, is the visible effect of the invisible forgiveness of whatever the inner brokenness of the person was.

Forgiveness and Healing belong together in this view.

We are glad for the paralytic...

But-you and I all know someone who is still in a chair after months of physiotherapy, and who won't get better.

Perhaps you are thinking of him or her now.

Perhaps these stories hurt a bit because we too wish so much a cure for our friend and have tried everything without success.

Consider again the two lines: When he saw their trust....he said to the man "your sins are forgiven". In other words: The friends determination opened the way to healing of the man's soul. That is something we can understand, can't we?

This is a beautiful illustration of how community works. When the community is determined to make a situation better, no matter the cost, amazing things happen.

Even when a cure does not happen, Healing can and often does happen.

Consider: We are both the friends and we are the man on the mat.

We all take turns.

We visit our neighbour; we drive them to appointments, we check their house and mow their lawn. We bake them a banana loaf and share a bowl of soup. We sit with someone and listen to the pain. We receive a card, or the bulletin. We laugh with a visitor, we share ideas. We rejoice when someone takes us for a drive. We say Thank you. We pray for one another.

When you are in the role of the friends you do sacred work. And your friend may heal.

And when your turn comes up to lie on the mat and be utterly dependent you trust that someone will do the same for you. And your gratitude for what is offered may heal your friends who may have been struggling with feeling worthless.

Being at peace with one's dependence on others is a beautiful thing.

You see I think that this biblical healing story celebrates mutual dependence.

This is quite different from what society suggests to us:

Which is that Independence is everything. We hear that we have worth only to the measure that we pull our own weight. That we must not become a burden. That we look after our needs ourselves.

Where does this come from?

Perhaps a residual of the pioneer mentality that you came and were expected to clear your own land and build your own home without being a burden to anyone, because everyone was so busy and caught up with their own tasks?

But really, historically that is a false. Very few first pioneers build their log homes all by themselves. You needed a group. It was more effective for people to help

one another and take turns, like the classical barn raising of the Mennonites. You needed to borrow tools until you were able to afford your own, which then in turn you could lend to other newcomers. Women helped each other in childbirth. Children needed nursing and swaddling and schooling, and the elderly needed looking after and they gave back their life experience in exchange. And everyone got sick at some time. An independent stubborn loner would die. Everyone else would realize how much they needed help.

Our society has become quite cruel in this way. Everything circles around the ideal of independence. We drive ourselves in our own cars, we shop on our own, we go for advice online. We make our decisions without consulting the people whom it affects the most. And even our grocery stores are called "independent"...which when you think of it, is really an impossible name....no one is independent here: You the customer, are totally dependent on what is stocked on the shelves in what state of freshness or decay, and at what price, and the store manager is totally dependent on the supply chain and the suppliers are dependent on the producers and they are dependent on the workers and the climate or weather and the banks and on the capacity to predict demand, the price of fertilizer or feed or seed. No one is independent here. Everyone is interdependent.

Together, we have elevated "independence" to an idol. Independence is an illusion. Smoke cloud.

Everyone depends on others. All the time. Interdependence is everything. Our gospel story celebrates interdependence: Ingenuity of friends helping a friend. The roofing crew embodies the beauty of inter-dependence. The man on the stretcher taught the guys how much creativity they could muster to help their friend. And Jesus was only too glad to help. The crew must have felt really good after that special day.