

North Presbyterian Church
June 17, 2012
Dr. H. Ken McCullen

Sermon: Imagine That!
Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

To properly appreciate the depth of this story it would help if we understood how the homes were constructed in biblical times. Obviously, the four men did not remove the roof of a home like ours today. The roof on a Palestinian house was usually flat. It was often used as a place of rest and quiet, and usually there was an outside stairway that ascended up to the roof of the house.

The construction of the roof lent itself to what our four, what I call engineers, did in our passage. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across the top from wall to wall, usually about three feet apart. The space between the beams was filled with brushwood and packed tight with clay. A powdery substance was then spread over the clay. This substance was called marl and was generally used to fertilize the soil that was deficient in lime. That combination created a solid clay mixture that firmly held the roof together. In fact, it was such a healthy combination that the roof could produce a flourishing crop of grass and people would sit on the roof and relax in the evening.

Another characteristic of such construction was that it made it easy to dig out a section between the beams to repair any damage. So, the four men dug out the filling and let their friend down directly at the feet of Jesus. Now several significant things must have been present to motivate the four men to perform such an unusual task.

First, they must have had a profound passion to heal their friend. Second, they must have had a profound belief that Jesus could heal their friend. And then there is yet another factor that led to their actions. There were so many people blocking the door of the house it was impossible to get their friend into the house. So, they had to use their imagination. Therefore, all the ingredients were present for love, faith and creativity to work together to bring about the miracle of healing. They had a love for their friend. They had a faith in Jesus. And they refused to be limited in their thinking. Their first two passions produced a creative spark that helped them overcome all limitations.

Now, think about all those people, gathered in the house, reverently and quietly, listening to the promises of God being proclaimed by Jesus. Suddenly, some loose dirt begins to fall from above. They all look up and see a part of the clay being removed and some falling among them. Then a large hole appears and a man is lowered into the midst of the packed house. The people must have been startled, and I can just hear them looking at each other and in astonishment saying, "Imagine that!" Even Jesus marveled at the creative spirits of the four men.

What incredible friends! They didn't say, look at the crowd, let's go home! No, they said, look at the crowd, we'll have to find another way to get our friend to Jesus.

Like the crowd at Capernaum, there are so many obstacles to overcome to allow the miracles of faith to function. If we could remove all barriers and allow our imaginations to wander, what problems would we bring to Jesus? We might look to end war, cancer, crime, homelessness, poverty, illness, loneliness. And we might seek peace and justice and equality. The reality is that the barriers to these very things are being overcome and brought to Jesus every day. Some of these efforts are well organized groups, but there are also multitudes of people working quietly behind the scenes to bring about the miracles of healing and change.

I believe that scripture and history give witness to the fact that God rejoices in those with open imaginations who are willing to risk doing something new to create an opportunity for the miracles of God to break out. Listen to just a few of the incredible situations where God used creative people to bring something new to life.

Abraham, didn't even know where he was going but he followed the call of God to bless all peoples and nations – Imagine that!

Moses led a nation out of bondage – Imagine That

David killed Goliath with a slingshot – Imagine That

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego survived a fiery furnace with prayer – Imagine That

Jesus was born in an isolated stable in an obscure village – Imagine That

Paul brought pagans to the resurrected Christ – Imagine That

Now expand your thinking to include our modern scene:

Bill Gates wasn't content as a computer programmer – Imagine That

Edison never stopped because of failures – Imagine That

Mother Teresa wasn't defeated by the politics of Calcutta – Imagine That

Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't quit because of brutal attacks – Imagine That

25 years in prison couldn't break Nelson Mandela's spirit – Imagine That

Sullenberger safely landed his plane on the Hudson River – Imagine That

Modern networking helped the explosion of the Arab Spring – imagine that!

All these historical blessings have taken place because there were people who refused to allow obstacles to dampen their spirits or conquer their faith. They probed and fought and invented and struggled to make humanity more compassionate and caring.

God doesn't want us to perform miracles. God wants us to be faithful and God will perform the miracles. I'm not certain the men who lowered their friend into the presence of Jesus ever expected what might happen, but their passion for healing their friend brought the friend and Jesus together and the miracle took place.

All congregations have people who, like the four men, bring the love of Christ to the lives and needs of others. I know there are many such examples in this congregation but I would like to share how three people here bring the love of Christ to others.

Harry Iliff started it, George Zoya took it to new heights and now under the direction of Juanita and Dick Zoya, food from this congregation continues to feed the hungry. In an outreach of faith, people from this church sacrifice their time to pack the food and the miracle of God uses that effort to feed the needy.

And then there's Mary Japs, who heard the call through serving on a presbytery committee. There are people in need of clothing and many in our churches have items of clothing they never use. So Mary joined the effort to collect clothing and take it to the Dayton Avenue Presbyterian Church where people can find good clothes to wear. And, of course, I know firsthand the heart Ruth Jones has for missions and the ministry of Christ around the world. The love of Christ motivates people like the Zoyas, Mary Japs, and Ruth Jones to create the miracles that feed and clothe and care for the people God loves.

As you go through this next week, let the love of Christ break through the barriers that keep you from hearing the cries, seeing the need, or responding to the call of God to serve the least of these. Let the love of Christ open your eyes to see people and the world in fresh new ways. Then, when you see a magnificent sunrise or a beautiful sunset, or look at your loved ones, your friends, or the needy, you can shout out with renewed joy, "Imagine That!" When you do that, God will perform miracles!