

Sermon Series: People in Motion

October 13, 2013

Title: Did You Make Your Bed Today?

Text: Acts 9:32-35

Summary: Peter's visit to the home of a paralytic shows us more than the healing power of Jesus. It shows us that Jesus sets us free for a whole new life, one in which we learn to take ownership of what it means to be made new.

Wasps & Spiders

Just feeding the kids:

Another season of boating on Lake Champlain is winding down. For me that means, among other things, another session of cleaning out the hard work of the mud dauber wasps that have turned my boat into a floating nursery all summer.

Mud daubers are rather elegant-looking insects. They aren't aggressive, but they work really hard to make sure that there will be plenty of mud daubers around next summer. Their strategy: build nests out of mud, fill them with food, lay an egg in each chamber, then seal it up so that when the egg hatches the new little wasp will not be disturbed.

So what does a mud dauber wasp larva like to eat? Spiders. But how do you provide fresh, juicy spiders to a larva locked inside a mud cocoon? That's where being a wasp comes in so handy: the wasp finds a spider, swoops down and stings it, paralyzing it but not killing it. Then the wasp carries the hapless spider off to the next, stuffs it down into the open tube-like cell, and goes off looking for another one. Some mud daubers provide as many as two dozen spiders in a single cell. When the egg hatches, the little larva has plenty of live food to eat until it emerges as an adult mud dauber.

Paralyzed:

After telling us the story of how Saul the rabbi got his start as an ambassador for King Jesus, Luke returns to Peter, one of the leaders of the Jesus followers in Jerusalem. We follow Peter -- on a journey, again -- as he visits groups of believers in three cities located in western Judea. Very likely these groups of believers came into existence as a result of the preaching and teaching of Philip after he left the Ethiopian eunuch. Peter's journey retraces Philip's own journey to Caesarea Maritima, the capital of the province.

On the first stop in the journey Peter encounters a man trapped in a kind of "suspended animation," a man who desperately needs to be set free:

Acts 9:32-33 NIV

As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.

Paralyzed. We all know people who suffer from some form of paralysis. It might be a family member who has suffered a stroke and lost the use of one side of his or her body. It might be a young person horribly injured in a car or motorcycle accident who is now confined to a wheelchair. It might be a star athlete who suffers a neck injury in front of tens of thousands of fans, and is carried off the field, never to play, or perhaps even walk, again.

Aeneas was just such a person. Something had happened, whether an accident or illness we don't know, that left him bedridden. Days and turned into months; months had stretched out into eight long years. There was no going back, no gradual healing. Being paralyzed was the "new normal" for Aeneas.

Aeneas had become a victim of the brokenness of this world. Eight years earlier he had been "stung" by an unseen force, struck down and unable to get up. I suppose in some ways his "new normal" was a kind of living death -- like the little spiders in the wasp nest. Alive and waiting to die.

Paralysis in many forms:

Paralysis comes in many forms.

Some of them are visible; most of them are not. We may have full control of all of our muscles, yet be paralyzed by such things as fear or doubt on the inside. We may have everything going for us by all appearances, yet find ourselves paralyzed by cravings or addiction.

Think of a place in your life where you feel helpless. Could it be that an unseen wasp has stung you in that area of your life and paralyzed you on the inside?

Think of a dream that has died. There was a time when you were filled with hope, excited about every new day. But then something happened. Something you did. Something someone else did. And that place where hope lived went numb.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had a vision of his people in just such a state. They had been conquered by their enemies and deported into exile. They had no hope of ever returning to their homeland. In the vision God shows him a valley filled with dried out bones.

Ezekiel 37:1-2 NIV

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.

He then explains the meaning of the vision:

Ezekiel 37:11 NIV

Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'"

And hanging over the entire vision is one question, posed by God Himself:

Ezekiel 37:3 NIV

He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

Jesus Heals You!

Peter's command:

When Peter walked into Aeneas' sickroom he found himself confronted with that same hopelessness. A man paralyzed for eight years, flat on his back with no prospect of ever getting up. A living death.

But Peter had seen this sort of thing before and knew that King Jesus was present within him to undo the sting of death. So he announces the King's Presence and issues a command on the King's behalf!

Acts 9:34 NIV

"Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up.

Life for the dry bones:

Long ago God had made a promise to Ezekiel. After showing him the people as desiccated bones strewn across the desert floor, and after asking Ezekiel of there is any hope for them, He says:

Ezekiel 37:12 NIV

Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

And that is precisely what Peter did: in the power of King Jesus he spoke to the shriveled muscles and dead nerves of the invalid and Aeneas got up off his bed, a new man.

"Jesus heals you!"

Peter would have remembered a time not long after he had first begun to follow Jesus as a disciple when Jesus encountered a paralyzed man. Friends had brought the man on his bed roll to Peter's own house in the little fishing village of Capernaum. The house had been packed with people who had come to listen to Jesus as He taught. In fact, the house was so full that it was impossible for the people carrying the paralyzed man to even get through the door, much less bring the man to Jesus.

Not to be deterred, they carried up on the roof of the house, dug a hole through it, and lowered the man down right in front of Jesus. It's at this point in the story that Jesus did something utterly unexpected:

Mark 2:5 NIV

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

The response among the religious experts who were present was less than enthusiastic!

Mark 2:6-7 NIV

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

And what did forgiving the man's sins have to do with addressing his present condition? Was Jesus saying that the man was paralyzed because he had done some terrible sin?

Jesus provides His own explanation to His critics:

Mark 2:9-12 NIV

Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

Jesus was making the point that He had come as King to not just heal a physical malady, but to cut the very taproot of evil at the source. He had come to *undo* the ancient curse caused by human rebellion against the Creator. He had come to "draw the sting" of Death itself from the human race. The healing of the sick man would be a manifestation of this far greater victory.

Did You Make Your Bed?

Marching orders:

The last thing that Peter said to Aeneas when he proclaimed King Jesus' healing of his paralysis was: "Get up and roll up your mat!" In other words, "Rise and shine, and don't forget to make your bed!"

Again, he would have well remembered Jesus saying much the same thing to the paralyzed man who had been lowered down from the ceiling:

Mark 2:11-12 NIV

So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

No looking back here; the focus is squarely on the future. Both Jesus and Peter announce to a newly healed person that he has a whole new life in front of him and it's up to him to embrace this amazing opportunity.

Did you make *your* bed yet?

Remember how I said that all of us have been stung into paralysis in one area of our lives or another? Paul tells us much the same thing and the end of his great chapter on the resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 NIV

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We've all been stung by that thing called Sin in one way or another. Most of the paralysis from the sting is on the inside. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory, reverses the sting, removes the poison from our minds and hearts -- all through our Lord Jesus Christ!

And that means that it's high time we got up, made our beds and got busy with the good work that He puts us here to do.

As Paul puts it:

1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

There are **no victims** in God's Kingdom. There are **no hopeless cases** in King Jesus' realm. We *were* held captive, but now we're free. We *were* paralyzed into a living death by Sin's sting, but now we're forgiven and made brand new.

Now it's time to fulfill that last command: "Roll up your bedroll and tuck it under your arm! Go start *living!* **God has given you the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**