

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**October 5 & 6, 2013**  
**John Crosby**  
**REGROUP: Friendly Troublemakers**  
**Mark 2:1-12**

We are in the middle of a fall where we are asking, what will make this community renewed? What will renew its life and vision, its heart? We spent a month saying that renewal begins with revive, bringing back to life, reviving, our relationship with Jesus. Last week we took a break and had a special conversation about race and faith with Babington, and now we are going to spend a month saying that out of revival comes regrouping. We are not left alone but are brought together so that this community and your relationship within it might change your life. Then next month we are going to talk about what happens after a revived faith meets other people with the same goals, and we are sent back out.

I'd like to ask you to take your Bibles out please, the Bibles in the pews if you didn't bring yours with you, and turn to Mark, chapter 2. Those of you who have been students of the Bible over the years will realize where the Gospel of Mark, chapter 2, is—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It's on page 1,490 if you need a little extra help. The story of Mark is the first one that was written down. The others, Matthew and Luke, built on the Gospel of Mark, were written within 20 years of Jesus' going to heaven. About seven years after that, about the year 115, one bishop is describing the Gospel of Mark to another and says, "So these are the stories that Peter the apostle told to young John Mark of the life of Jesus, although not necessarily in order." In other words, it wasn't then B, then C, then D, then E. They are just stories run together but lumped together for a reason. Mark starts out by telling four miracle stories in a row. This is the third of them. There were four miracle stories in a row that Jesus told to begin His life on earth and to show that He will not be like any of the religious teachers that they have known. He will be the touch of God on people's lives. In each of those cases, the people responded to the touch of Jesus in a different way. Today we look at some friendly troublemakers. Mark, chapter 2, beginning with verse 1.

**1** A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum,

That was His home base up north, Capernaum.

the people heard that he had come home. **2** They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3** Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. **4** Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowering the mat the man was lying on. **5** When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." **6** Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, **7** "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" **8**

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? **9** Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? **10** But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, **11** "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." **12** 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!"

Recently when we looked at this passage, I said that one of the two keys to understanding it is the reaction of the teachers, "This is blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The story is told to focus on who Jesus is, so who can forgive sins but God alone probably should be underlined in your Bible. If it is not, underline it because somebody wasn't following along with that great sermon. The other key in this story comes in verse 5. I'd like you to circle where it says *when Jesus saw their faith* because when Jesus saw their faith, then He acted. The Bible is not written as a book. It was told as a story, and the reason it was told as a story was because lectures are about things that go on in the head, but stories are supposed to lodge in the heart and stay with us.

This is a story that is supposed to lodge in the heart, and the only way it lodges in the heart is if you identify who you are in this story today. When you watch a TV show or a movie, you identify primarily with one of the characters. Who are you in the story? Would you say that you are on the mat? As you read this story, is this a rough week for you? Or are you in a season of light? Or are you honest enough to say, "I'm in a little trouble" or "a lot of trouble"? Others of you, though, feel like this is one week that is for other people. You feel slightly superior to those people who can't get it done on their own. "They just don't have enough faith." You would probably be in the crowd. I'd ask all of you, do you have a group of people, sisters or brothers, who carry mats with you? Who if they called in the middle of the night, you would be there in minutes for them? Who if you were sick, you would call them? That if something was happening, you would carry mats together? Do you have that group of people? Or, who you are in the story is watching the action from the crowd and half of you is wondering, "Whoa! That looks crazy. Who is going to pay for that roof?" And the other half of you is longing, "Boy, I wish I had friends like that." Even before Jesus does anything, "Boy, I wish I had friends like that."

We want to go from reviving our faith to regrouping because we think that too often we are in this alone and we are not supposed to be. Every week for the next three weeks, I'd like to have the theme of the sermon be from Craig Groeshel. Craig wrote this. He said, "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." I have to give you a disclaimer. I think this goes beyond your spouse if you are married. Show me your friends and I'll show you your future because friends rub off. Not that if you sit with wealthy friends, you will get wealthy or if you sit with outsiders, you will become an outsider. The reality is that we become like the people we spend our time with. Friends rub off. Show me your friends and I'll show you your future. Proverbs 13 says it this way.

**20** Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

It can go either way. Show me your friends and I'll show you your future. So today as I talk, I want you to think about who your friends are. Few of us, I think, walk through life with enough friends that we could have one on each corner holding the mat and carrying us to Jesus. I was

reminded of that this last week. Laura and I were in Washington, D.C. Our older daughter Katy is living alone now because Maggie just got married. She's been in this new apartment about six weeks and I said, "Honey, do you know any of your neighbors?" She goes, "Dad, this is D.C. We don't even look at each other." She has a group of friends, but it's not the people right around her and she wouldn't have those friends if she didn't reach out to them. I think very few of you have enough friends. Women, I think you have a ton of friends. I think women are better at this, but you don't have FRIENDS, capital-F capital-R friends, in abundance.

I think a couple of things make it harder to have friends these days. I think there is an increased level of mobility where we are always changing. Sometimes we are changing geographically. Sometimes careerwise. Sometimes school. The increased mobility means that the average American moves every five years. The average person under 40 moves every three years. It is hard to have those kinds of mat-carrying friends if you are changing players all the time. In the same way, I've got to tell you, I think the modern conveniences of life, the world you guys are growing up in, is tougher on friends than the one that your great-grandparents grew up in. One of the sociologists I read for this said he thought the biggest change in relationships in the United States was because of the invention of the air conditioner. The air conditioner changed the world because before the air conditioner, people lived on the outside of their houses until they went to bed. Houses had porches wrapped all the way around them and depending on which way the wind blew, people would be outside somewhere talking with their neighbors instead of inside.

In the same way that air conditioning is convenient but shrinks the pool, think about what the attached garage does. I've got to tell you, I'm all for attached garages in Minnesota. Jesus invented the attached garage. But then the Holy Spirit brought along the remote control to open the door so you can skid into your driveway, drive up into the garage, click that remote down, and never have to see another human being until you are in the kitchen: convenience that isolates us.

Air conditioning is big, but my vote for the biggest isolator of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the television set. The 25-plus hours that human beings spend even if they are in the same room in parallel play in front of the TV. Or I don't know what it is. It could be anything for you. Maybe it is the answering machine on your cell phone. Don't you love that? You look and see who is calling and you go, "I doon't think so" and you decide if you are going to respond later. There is not the instant relationship that happens because we are in control.

The last one I think, is actually something probably common for those at the 11:00 service and for most at The Table tonight in that it looks like it is a relationship developer but can hurt relationships, and that is social media. I think the explosion of Facebook happened because people are hungry for relationships. Twitter thrives because you want everybody to know that you opened the refrigerator door and you didn't have any mustard. What happens is that these gadgets that are supposed to bring us together, in the end bring on an epidemic that sociologists call deferred loneliness. It looks like I'm active with friends but it just defers my loneliness. Even in the midst of a crowd, even around the world, there is activity. The point I guess I'm trying to make is that I think we have tons of acquaintances and thousands of friends but we have very few people close enough in our lives to pick up the mat, willing to embarrass themselves by doing what these men in the story of Jesus did. I believe that God's answer to your being lonely is to be mat carriers, developing a community, not a crowd, that reflects what the early church experienced in Acts 2. It says,

<sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food . . . .

Daily they met together in the temple and learned. Daily they met together in each other's houses and shared. Daily they offered one another anything so that no one in their midst was in need. They had relationships that went far below, "How're you doing?" "I'm great." God's answer to lonely people who don't even know they are lonely sometimes is community.

Laura and I have had the privilege for the last 24 years of being in one of the best communities on Planet Earth. I love this church. I really do. But I love this church not because we laugh together and worship together or because we send millions of dollars to Africa, I love this church because inside this community, I have a sub-community. Just six of those people have changed my life. For them, I am not the pastor. I am "John, you're late again." I am a person who is in love with his wife, Laura, but driving her crazy, and these six people know that. We have been people who have stood at the gravesides of one another's parents and at the baptisms of one another's children. I have experienced graduations with them and have sat with them and they have sat with me as we had prayers so these young adults would have kids when they couldn't have kids. Then we had prayers when they did have kids for those kids. We have experienced job losses together, times where life made no sense, and times when you feel guilty that things are going so well for you and everybody is having a tough time. That's what I love about this church because it has brought together some people who would do life with me. I can call them after midnight, I *have* called them after midnight, and they have picked up the mat.

You guys might remember that on our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at CPC, we decided to raise a million dollars to send abroad, a million dollars to spend on domestic ministry, and one of the missions that we chose was the Congo. It was a great thing. The celebration that we had on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was special. We couldn't all fit in here so we went out to Grace Church in Eden Prairie and gathered there, 3,000-plus of us. My daughter was so enamored of the idea that she flew back from college and sat with us. As we were singing *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, I looked down the row and saw my little college-age, too-cool-for-words daughter crying so hard that her tears were staining her blouse. I was like, "Oh, honey" and I gave her the dad hug. "Love you." And, of course, her mom goes, "Honey, what are you thinking? What are you feeling? What's going on?" "I looked around at all these people, Dad, all these people, Mom, and I saw your friends and thought how they have taught me how to follow Jesus." That's what God wants of us.

We sometimes make a mistake, we evangelicals. We talk about a personal relationship with Jesus, I think that's huge, but I think that's a burden. I think it's not enough. That's not the way the Bible talks about God's work. God doesn't talk about a personal relationship with Jesus. He talks about the Kingdom of Heaven. The church is the colony of heaven. He said,

**20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them" [Matthew 18:20].

"I'm there in the middle of them." We're doing this series about regrouping because I am afraid that we have become a church with small groups. We have over 1,000 people in small groups. I don't want us to be a church with small groups. I want us to be a church of small groups so that each of you who want to be a part of this community can find a small group of people and do life together and bring your friends closer to Jesus. That's what we want. It doesn't always have to

look like six women sitting around the kitchen table, studying the Book of Acts. That's great, but it could look like the choir. It could look like the Sunday Communities that are going on for all different ages and stages. It could look like a group of guys who take bike rides together. The key is, are you getting to know one another well enough that you can let down your guard? Are you getting to know one another well enough that you can pray for each other, spend life together?

We have a lot of small groups, but is mat carrying happening? Let me just tell you a couple of things about mat carriers that I got from this text. The first mark of mat carriers is that **they need each other**. They need to live together. Americans are individuals. We are independent. But Christians realize we have to dig below the surface to what really matters and learn to trust each other with our secrets so people know when we need a mat and so I will know when I need to carry somebody else. Do you have anybody who is that close? I struggle with this. I've got to tell you, I struggle with this. I talk about my six close friends, but they are six of about 11. I have 11 in the world. Six of them are here. I'm a guy. I'm an introvert. Do you have people that you live together with at that level?

The second mark of a mat carrier that I saw in the story of Jesus was that it was **inconvenient and not accidental**. Roof breaking only happens when it is a priority in your life. In one of my groups, we agreed that *if you are in town, you are here*. It is a priority for us. I groan every Tuesday morning at 6:25 when I have to get up to get there, but by 7:30, I am so glad I went. It's a priority. Craig Groeschel says this, "You may be one community away from changing the course of your destiny, but you'll never stumble into it . . ." Because you have too many excuses. Your life is not built for community right now. Some of you are too busy. Some of you are too shy. "Small groups aren't my kind of thing." Some of you aren't in a group because you haven't been invited. Some of you don't feel like you fit in. Some of you don't know where to start. Some of you are not in a group because you don't know how. I would like to take care of that for you right now.

As you leave today, the ushers will point out to you our October copy of *CPC Life*. On page 8 is A Call to Regroup, how we become a church of small groups. Page 9 offers about 17 different opportunities for you to try a group. Do not start a group and say, "Okay, we're here together till we die." You'll scare away the sane people. What you need to do is say, "Let's try this for six weeks. I can stand anybody for six weeks." You don't say that last part out loud. You try, and then maybe, a group out of the group forms and you build that group. We want to help develop mat carriers with you. You need to say, "I need other people." When you can agree that mat carrying is a priority in your life, you will have those deep relationships you hunger for.

The third mark of mat carriers is that they **bring other people to Jesus**. This hole in the roof comes about and the guys dropped the paralytic through the roof.

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

Don't settle for being a friend. Mat carriers are much more than friends. Come to Jesus together and bring other people there. Once a year we note that people all over Planet Earth are gathering around tables like this with fellow mat carriers and they are saying, "I am coming to Jesus because it's been a hell of a week. It has been a week where hell has won the earth. I

need to know that You are still with me. Guys, girls, I need to know that Jesus is still here.” “Looking at their faith, Jesus says, ‘I forgive you.’” Not, “I heal you,” “I forgive you.” Because when we come to this table, when people carry us on the mat to this table, it’s not a pill that makes everything better. It’s not a book that has all the answers. It’s a place where life comes out of forgiveness and grace and love that will not let you go. This is the table where God rescues people, and we invite you to join us.

Lord Jesus, I thank You for my friends here, some of whom feel a little more alone today because they hear about people so close that they will do anything for—a sister or a brother and they don’t have those people in their lives. I pray that You will help them reach out that they might not live alone, that they might not die alone, that You will bring mat carriers into their lives. I thank You, Lord Jesus, for this table. We come together because it’s the only thing that holds us together. As we take this bread, we remember that You broke it so that it became Your Body. We drink this juice and remember how You said that it was the way to be forgiven, through Your Blood. Then we pick up the corner of our mats and we walk away together with You. Bless us this day in Your Name. Amen.

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