

October 11, 2020

Mark 2:1-5

This Sunday is Access Sunday and Disabilities Awareness Week on our denominational calendar, which is why we are focusing on A2A today. A2A is short for accessible to all. A2A is a justice issue here at Amicable and the more I pondered A2A and the more I meditated on this Sunday's scripture passage, the more I have come to understand the true depth and breadth of A2A, as a justice issue.

Making our building A2A is of vital importance, even though we are not gathering in the building during this time of physical-distancing. To illustrate why I say this, today's Bible story is a good place to begin. Whose faith today is so large that they are willing to find a crane to raise someone up to the roof just to get into the building, especially a church?

Without ease of entry, many people cannot hear the good news of our faith. So, making our building physically accessible to all is of great importance. Even if we cannot gather to worship in our building at the moment, our building is at least a very large billboard, which tells the world we want everyone to feel invited and welcomed into our church building and our community of faith.

(I don't want to imply that churches, whose buildings are not fully accessible, do not want everybody to feel invited and welcomed into their church. It does take a great deal of money and time to make this happen and not all churches can afford this. We have done it, but we still have a large mortgage to go with it. This is an unashamed plug to anyone who would like to help us pay down our mortgage. Ten dollars or one hundred thousand dollars are welcome gifts.)

Having a building be physically accessible is vital, if we want people to hear the good news of God's love revealed in Jesus the Christ. But, in truth, a physically accessible building is only the beginning of being an A2A congregation. As important as having access is for any and all, people who come in the door must feel seen and welcome.

The paralyzed man, carried in by friends, would not have experienced the good news of God's love, if Jesus had not noticed him, welcomed him, and offered him encouraging words of support. The good news of God's love has to be more than heard, it has to be experienced. Not all churches live out this good news. As Jamie pointed out in their testimonial, they know people who have been traumatized by people who call themselves "Christians".

A2A is more than just physical accessibility. The true goal of A2A is to welcome into one's community those who are different and to see them as a part of the oneness of all creation. This begins with wanting to get to know a person; wanting to learn about them, to affirm them in who they are, and even learn from them. For those who have been oppressed to the point of feeling paralyzed by life, truly being seen can offer them the possibility to see who or what they might grow into as a beloved child of God. It can free them from any paralysis in their life. It also has the reverse effect – allowing them to help us grow into who or what God wants us to be.

I believe Amicable Church can be a warm and caring and welcoming community. Jamie's testimonial today moved me to tears. They found welcome, acceptance, love here. They were empowered to be themselves, to accept and love who they are. And, at the same time, I will testify that Jamie has

taught me, they have challenged me; a challenge that has made me better, more open to and caring of others.

We become an A2A congregation, when we work at understanding the injustices that afflict and oppress people, even if we are not affected by the injustice or we think we are not the cause of a particular injustice. We can work at understanding the injustices of this world by taking time to learn about the oppression, but, more importantly, by welcoming in and listening to the people who bear the brunt of an injustice. As we welcome them into our community and listen to their story, an understanding and a relationship can grow. And, this understanding, this being in relationship will change us, transform us, and the world.

Returning to Jesus and the paralyzed man, by making our church building physically accessible Amicable Church has taken a big step forward in the goal of living into being A2A, accessible to all. Now a paralytic person can get in the building. But, once in, are we willing to welcome them and listen to them or even look at them? Are we willing to see what keeps them, and us, immobile? Are we willing to help them find a way to stand and carry their mat? Or, are we the scribes, whether the person is deserving or not?

In the parable Jesus tells the man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” This can be greatly misunderstood. I cringe at the phrase “hate the sin, love the sinner.” This is a phrase too often hurled at people who are different from whatever the “norm” is. Adding to our misunderstanding about sin is a question the disciples put to Jesus in another story: “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” Jesus is not talking about karma when forgiving the paralytic.

What Jesus is forgiving are all the things that have kept the man paralyzed, most of which are the man’s own

insecurities about himself – the self-blame for his immobility and society’s shaming for who he is and what condition he is in. Jesus sees this and offers welcome and acceptance and love– that is what forgiveness is. It is a welcome that allows the man to accept who he is and throw off all the things that have kept him oppressed and immobile.

As a people of God seeking to live into being an A2A congregation, we are called to welcome in and listen to people and issues that may seem foreign to us, that might make us uncomfortable. We are called to try to understand those treated unjustly by an unjust system, and to wonder why they are so treated. As our knowledge grows and as our welcome deepens relationships, we will move closer and closer to being a community of faith that is truly A2A.

As we seek to live into being fully accessible to all may Amicable’s beacon light of God’s love grow ever brighter, allowing any and all of God’s children access to the healing and wholeness that a relationship with the Holy One, in and through a welcoming, accepting, and loving community, offers. Amen.