

I contribute some of my time to Christian Junior Farmers, in which we get soft pinewood from South Carolina, and with lathes and saws make walking sticks, drill a hole and string some beads by the handle. Just as you see yard sticks. We offer these sticks when there is a booth at fall fairs, tractor pulls, plowing matches and so forth. We offer them the stick and ask if can we spend a moment and tell the story of the colored beads, which I will relate to you at the end of the sermon, especially the white and green colored beads.

But to begin with, the Bible passage which we read, is a story which has one surprise following another. And if we are a little bit like the people in Jesus days, then we can say with them, " We have never seen anything like this." The story is loaded with fascinating events: first of all, the large number of people gathered at the home of Jesus so that there wasn't any room left inside the house. The people were packed together Then there was the rude manner in which these four men let down a friend not through the door but through the roof! Would you believe it? We would think that perhaps only naughty boys would think of such an idea. Who would dare to do this? Breaking open the roof of someone else's house. And then, even more flabbergasting, that a man, paralyzed for life and let down on a stretcher, is ordered by Jesus to get up your sins are forgiven.

No wonder people of Capernaum go home that afternoon, shaking their heads, praising God and muttering to themselves, "We have never seen anything like this." And yet, the lame man was not the center of interest, nor was the unusual circumstances. Of course, we are all deeply touched by them because we are naturally interested in what happens to people

But that is not the reason why the gospel writer Mark has recorded this incident. Mark wants to show the reader that Jesus is the center of interest. He gives another glimpse of the Savior. The people who happened to be in the house were only bystanders, their main purpose for coming there was to hear Jesus preach. And the other circumstances were only of minor importance, Jesus stands in the central place and that's why the house was so full to begin with.

Already in vs 2 we read that Jesus preached the word to them. It happened once in the Old Testament times that the people of Israel inquired of the prophet. "Is there any Word of the Lord?" And yes there is the word of the Lord which comes directly from the mouth of Jesus himself. For this purpose Jesus came into the world. And he wants to echo the word all over creation and throughout the centuries. He wants us to hear it today, loud and clear. Jesus did not come in the first place, to make sure all people would have enough to eat, nor to heal all the sick, or to end all wars and misery Jesus came into the world to proclaim the good news that God is in the process of restoring mankind by showing us how to live, teaching and bearing our sins upon the cross. Ah, how we wish we could have been among the crowd that day when Jesus was preaching the word to them "come unto me I will give you rest for your soul." What a sermon! What a wonderful preacher.

And then it happened - while the people were spellbound with that most wonderful news there is a disturbance caused by a group of men who carefully lowered a mattress through the ceiling and deposit this man right at the feet of Jesus. Jesus stops the sermon as he now is forced to deal with this extraordinary situation. A tense hush falls over the packed crowd. Their eyes go alternately from focusing on the Preacher and wondering how he is going to handle this rare interruption to looking up at the hole in the ceiling where four men somewhat awkwardly lean over with great expectation in their eyes. Yet who shall say what these four friends had tried before? They may have consulted every doctor available in the area - anything at all to get their buddy back on his feet. But all to no avail. Then...when news went through the neighborhood that Jesus was coming home, they decided to get hold of him before leaving town. And even the large crowd was not going to stop them. Quite some adventure! What loyal friends.

Perhaps you think that they went a little too far. Just imagine the brutal way they tore open the tile/boards of the roof of his house apart. That could have made him angry. But he did not focus on the destructive roof or these inconsiderate folks tearing dust and plaster down on people. No doubt Jesus must have looked up to. And what did he see? No, Jesus was not struck by the demolition of the ceiling, nor by their uncivilized rudeness, but he saw their faith, not their face but their faith! Jesus knew what to look for. Just like a mother will overlook the dirty clothes and muddy hands when her little child brings her some hand-picked flowers. The mother sees the love in the heart of the

child. In a similar way, Jesus was not bothered by the broken tiles or boards. He saw the eager look in their eyes. These four men were serious with Jesus. They had faith in him. They believed in Him. They believed Jesus could do something for them. That's what faith is all about. Believing Jesus can do something for you.

And that is what Jesus saw in their eyes. Those four men had done everything possible to get to Him, to be helped by him. And they firmly believed that Jesus would help them. And so, when Jesus saw in their eyes and their hearts, He didn't mind that He was interrupted in his sermon. And after a moment filled with silence, He looked at the man lying on the mat in front of Him and said. "Son, your sins are forgiven." That's all. It may have sounded rather strange under the circumstances with this man lying there. It may have made the people raise their eyebrows when they heard Jesus say, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Just think for a minute. These four men on the roof looking down had taken Jesus seriously and now it almost appears as if Jesus is not taking them and their paralytic friend seriously. After all, this man was lying in front of Him. This as if Jesus didn't address the issue. Is that what this man had come for? Does Jesus avoid the need for physical healing which this man so desperately longs for? Therefore, Jesus diagnosed the illness correctly and He offers the right treatment for the real problem. And when Jesus announces forgiveness to him, one can hear the compassion and love in his voice. Slowly and clearly Jesus had pronounced these words so that everyone could hear it. "Son your sins are forgiven " That is the greatest need all people have- to have their sins forgiven.

I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon I would explain the color of the beads we hand out so I will give you beads and a pamphlet with an explanation. Gold represents Heaven a place and city of pure gold Black represents sin putting a rift between man and God because God is holy and pure Red represents the blood of Jesus taking our sins upon the cross. White represents purity forgiving our sins as was mentioned in today's Bible story. Green represents to Go and Grow, new life in Christ When other people see us following Jesus and praising God they might also say " We've never seen anything like this." Amen.