

The Healing of the Paralysed Man (Luke 5, 17 – 26)

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Introduction

The motivation of the doctor, and the motivation of the patient, is the theme of our conference.

What motivates us as helping professionals, as help-seeking patients and as relatives of a patient, not to give up, not to resign? It is well known that our motivations are multi-faceted. The whole of our conference should serve to give us some more insight into our motivations.

We now turn to our bible text and try to listen to what this text has to do with our conference theme. It is the story of the healing of a paralysed man - a story we all know well already. I will read it in St. Luke's version:

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralysed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

We will now look at this story predominantly from the motivation aspect. What motivates the main participants to put themselves out for the healing of this paralysed man? The main participants in this healing event are: the men who carry the paralysed man to Jesus, the paralysed man himself, and Jesus.

The men who carry the paralysed man to Jesus:

This is what our story tells us about them:

Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said ...

We do not know from the story, what relationship these men have with the paralysed man: are they friends, are they relatives, are they people whose services have been called on by the paralysed man and his relatives – as it were the first-aiders of the

time? Whatever they were, they were in any case men who were wholeheartedly involved. They do not give up, when they cannot gain access through the door. They come up with the good idea of uncovering the roof and so bring the paralysed man to Jesus. They choose, in their desire to help the paralysed man, an unusual, unconventional method. The main thing is that the sick man gets help.

What drives them, what motivates them, to act in this way?

Jesus sees and acknowledges their action as “faith”. The men have the faith, the confidence that Jesus can help. They have – we can assume – already heard of Jesus and his healing miracles, and have now come to him with this paralysed man, in order that he will also be helped.

The faith of these men is a great challenge for us. Sure, we also take trouble and get involved with sick relatives or friends. We care for them, we suffer with them, we want them to be helped, we wish them to receive the optimum medical treatment. We also carry the sick in prayer to Jesus, we make intercession for them, that they may receive strength to endure their lot.

But – dare we today say to a person who is seriously ill, “We will pray to Jesus that he heals you”? Here our opinions differ. Some are very reserved and urge caution. They would not want the seriously ill person, in case he does not get healed, to doubt God’s love even more – as he perhaps does in any case. Others would like to re-activate the forgotten gift of healing, so that more healing intervention from God will happen in our time.

The paralysed man:

He lies on a bed, cannot move, he is carried to Jesus by the men. We do not know from the story, whether he has asked the men for this service, or whether the initiative comes from other people. But what is clear from the story is that he allows this “being carried to Jesus”, that is, he has an expectation, though perhaps only small, that something positive could happen to him. He has probably also heard of the wonderful healing miracles that have happened through Jesus.

There he lies now in front of Jesus, in the middle of the crowd of people.

There follows an impressive meeting between Jesus and the paralysed man, which we will have a closer look at. In the course of this meeting the paralysed man is healed.

At the end of the healing narrative it says of the once paralysed man:

Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

We have a different person in front of us. At the beginning he was immobile, he also appeared to be dumb; at the end he can walk, has regained his speech and is praising God. We have here the resurrection of a person in front of us.

And now to **Jesus**: What motivates him to heal?

Fundamentally one could say that Jesus does not need any specific motivation to heal the paralysed man. He has come into the world out of love for us human beings, to help us, to save lives, to heal lives. Nevertheless we get in this story a hint that there is a right time, a “kairos”, for the healing of the paralysed man. It says in verse 17:

And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

We are here given a small insight into the mystery that the healing action of Jesus takes place in association with his Father. Jesus acts with authority, but not in an autocratic way.

Jesus turns to the paralysed man and his companions.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

What is Jesus saying? Is he bringing illness and sin into a causal relationship? That confuses us. For in another story of healing of a blind man (John 9, 1 – 3), we hear that Jesus clearly rejects the connection between illness and sin. Perhaps we will get nearer to the meaning of Jesus’ behaviour, if we take as our starting point the fact that Jesus understands a person instantaneously. Jesus has probably seen intuitively that this paralysed man suffers at least as much from guilt feelings and self-reproach as from his paralysis. And so he first meets this need with a saving response.

It is not unknown to us that people, when confronted with the diagnosis of a serious illness, start to ask how it could have happened and whether they have perhaps contributed to this illness through a bad lifestyle. This is a question a friend of mine asked herself – although she had always lived in a healthy and sensible way – when she learnt that she had cancer. Should I have eaten more healthily, worked less, taken more exercise? Question after question, insecurity, and vague tormenting guilt feelings.

When such a person is told: Whatever you are guilty of or think you are guilty of, you are loved, you are forgiven, all is well between me, God, and you as a person – then that is a huge relief for the person concerned!

We return to the meeting between Jesus and the still paralysed man. Jesus firstly responds to the heartache of the paralysed man by giving him forgiveness for his sins.

This leads to a short theological debate between the teachers of the law and Jesus. We will leave that on one side and concentrate on what happens between Jesus and the paralysed man, who after an internal resurrection also experiences an external resurrection. Jesus says to him:

Get up, take your mat and go home!

And the miracle happens: the paralysed man gets up, takes his mat, praises God and goes home.

I now come to the **Conclusion:**

We asked at the beginning: what motivates us as a doctor, a patient or a relative of a patient, not to give up?

I think that, along with the different motivations, there is one that we all have in common: we have in ourselves a deep knowledge that we are actually appointed to life. We carry in ourselves a longing for a good, spotless life. We perceive of ourselves as having complete well-being of body and soul. And this complete life we wish to serve/support.

At the same time we know that this perfect life does not exist on this earth any more. We are in suspense between the endurance of suffering, illness and death, and the experience that cures do take place, again and again, as signs, a kind of foretaste, of our future redemption. In the bible text that we have looked at together, we have an account of such a wonderful cure.