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Mark 2:1-12

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We are the Key Persons

It was the time when Jesus was preaching the word in a house in Capernaum. On that day, there were so many people who wanted to hear Jesus' message that there was no room left at the door. At that time, dust began to fall from the ceiling with a rustling sound. Many people who were right below them must have evacuated immediately. Today in Japan, a loud alarm would have startled everyone, "Earthquake! It's an emergency!" A big alarm would have sounded and everyone would have been surprised. Jesus and everyone else were looking up at the ceiling. To their surprise, a large bed was coming down from there. Suddenly, a man appeared underneath, blowing a whistle and shouting, "Right! Left! Alright! Alright! Now, straight ahead!" and led it. What happened was very funny and annoying. The crowd was buzzing. Mark 2:3, "Some men came bringing him a paralytic, carried by four of them." Amazingly, four people carried the sick man with the paralytic to Jesus. When I think of those who have been sick for 38 years without anyone to take him into the Pool of Bethesda (John5:5), this person with the paralytic must be very loved by the family and friends around him.

When you look at the bold, courageous actions of these four people, we can see that they really wanted him to be cured and loved him very much. Even today, brain disorders such as Alzheimer's (Chūbu in Japanese) are not easily cured, but about 2,000 years ago, it must have been even more hopeless. The sick person himself and others around him rushed to Jesus when they thought that they would not be cured unless a miracle happened. I think there are people among us who wish for a miracle to happen. We want our sick family members to be healed, our legal problems to be resolved, our businesses to not go bankrupt, our relationships to work out, our spiritual struggles to be settled, and so on. Recently, we have been studying with Pastor Gerald a book called "God's Story, Our Story." There are many miracle stories in the Bible, such as the one we have today. I pray that the miracles of the Bible will become our stories.

Then, how can we experience miracles? Look at verse 5, "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic. 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" We can learn a few things from this verse. First, Jesus saw and worked on "their faith". He is not looking at the faith of the sick man, but at the faith of the four of them. A life of faith cannot be lived alone. It is very important to live a life

of faith with family, friends, and brothers and sisters in the church.

I used to work as a school counselor at an elementary school and a junior high school in Japan. What I found out was that Hutoukou who was maladjusted kid at school do not come to the counseling room, but his mother do. And while a Hikikomori who was with obsessive-compulsive neurosis did not come to the counseling room, but his father did. These surrounding people are called 'key persons' in technical terms. In psychiatry, this key person is an important person who is indispensable for the treatment of the sick person.

Today's four people were the key persons of those who had the paralytic. Since Jesus healed the sick person through the faith of these four people, the presence of faithful family members and friends as key persons plays a very important role in the spiritual issue. Even if the person's will and zeal are not strong, they can be saved and healed through the prayers and works of the believers around them.

There are many examples of this in the Bible. Jesus praised the faith of the Roman centurion who prayed for his servant (Matthew 8:10) and the Canaanite mother who prayed for her daughter who was possessed by an evil spirit (Matthew 15:28). And also Jesus heard their prayers and healed their friend and family.

Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household." This verse is very encouraging, especially for Japanese Christians like us. There are occasions when only one of us is a Christian and no one else in our family believes. However, we are the spiritual key persons for our family members and sick friends who do not have faith. Let us not be discouraged by faith, but continue to pray. George Muller prayed for decades for his friend's salvation, and his friend was saved shortly before he was called to heaven, as is well known from his testimony (1). Our faith causes miracles to happen in the lives of our family and friends.

Next, Jesus is the God who forgives sins. Look again at verse 5: "Son, your sins are forgiven." This statement by Jesus was criticized by the scribes and later by the religious leaders, and would become the crime of blasphemy, which was a crime that deserved crucifixion. In verse 9, Jesus asked the religious leaders, "Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk!'" From a human point of view, forgiving sins and healing the sick are both things that humans cannot do. However, as you have probably heard, healing does occur in Buddhism, Hinduism, new religions and even cult. But being healed and made

healthy cannot save them, can it? Verse 10, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." Salvation is not available unless sins are forgiven and a relationship with God is restored. And this salvation is a gift that can only be given to those who believe in the cross of Jesus. Since Jesus is God, He has the authority to forgive sins. He gave top priority to the salvation of the soul of the paralytic and gave him the grace to have his sins forgiven.

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear the testimonies of Kanamaru-san and her husband, Sanehiro-san. Due to the influence of Covid-19, they had the time when they were having a family communion service. After examining the cross of Jesus with bread and grape juice, they each prayed. According to his wife, Noriko, rather than praying for healing, Sanehiro prayed for repentance, confessing his sins to God. When Noriko saw this, she said, "I was so moved to hear my husband's prayer because I had been praying only for his healing." I was also moved to tears when I heard their stories. Sanehiro-san has been suffering from cancer for a long time, and I'm sure he has some dissatisfaction with God, but he confessed his sins in front of God. I really felt that repentance is a dialogue of love between the Father our God and his son, Sanehiro. I was happy to know that he was able to have a deep communion with God in the midst of his painful illness. I thought that loving communion with God the Father was what Jesus would have wanted for the paralytic in today's text.

But Jesus not only blesses him spiritually, but also heals his sickness so that he will not be crippled in this world. He said, "Get up, take your mat, and walk." He said to him, "Get up." And he arose, and immediately took up his mat, and went out before them all. And all the people were astonished and praised God, saying that they had never seen anything like this before. All the miraculous accounts in the Bible are done to show that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31). It is never just about the miracles. Jesus said to the paralytic, "Arise!" With this word, the man got up and walked out in front of everyone. God's word is 'dabar' in Hebrew, and it has two meanings. One is the linguistic meaning of "word". The other meaning is "thing, accomplishment" (2). Since God's Word is life, this Word has the power to accomplish things. The paralytic who could not walk for years and years was able to walk just because Jesus directly told him to get up. He was taken by those four people, heard Jesus' voice directly, and his life changed 180 degrees. When many people saw him, they said, "Wow! We've never seen anything like this! Hallelujah!" and expressed their glory to God.

This is the testimony of a member of a church in Tegu, Korea that I heard last month on

Youtube. She is about 75 years old and seems to be a faithful person. Suddenly, she was struck by Alzheimer's disease and was hospitalized because her body was paralyzed. She was also suffering from degenerative arthritis in her right knee, a chronic disease. She was unable to move during her stay in the hospital, so she spent all her time reading and memorizing the Bible. One day, after being in the hospital for many months, she heard God's voice in her ear telling her to wake up. She was so surprised that she woke up suddenly. Then she was able to walk without any pain at all. Her doctor was amazed, and as a result of the examination, the paralysis disappeared and there was new cartilage in her right knee, which had been worn out, but was regenerated like that of a young man. This testimony was given in May 2021, so miracles still happen today (3).

I was amazed to hear this testimony and I thought that my mother's degenerative arthritis could also be cured like her. Then I remembered something that happened, months ago. In fact, while my mom was listening to a program from Korea last July, she noticed that her pain from rheumatism, in one finger of her left hand had completely disappeared. She had the pain for a year until then. It's an amazing thing that happened, isn't it?

Since then, my mother has been listening to this program every day live on Youtube. But it has a ZOOM service once a month which was a healing service by a famous Christian broadcaster in Korea. To be honest, I had always avoided the idea of healings because I thought that Biblical miracles don't happen in modern times, so healing was an odd thing to do. However, after hearing about my mother's rheumatism getting better and the testimony of this Tegu person, I wanted to grant her wish. I repented of ignoring my mother's wish to be healed and immediately contacted the program in Korea so that she could attend the service last month.

And, how thankful it was! Out of hundreds of people, my mother was chosen and prayed for. Wow! It was so wonderful. However, she is not healed yet. But there was a change in my mother. She was always depressed because of the pain, but she started praying with hope, and she expressed her hope to go on a short-term mission trip to the country of Haiti after she is healed. It is also a miracle that this hope was given to her. I am glad that I was able to do something for my mother like the four people in the Bible today. And now I am praying with my mother that her cartilage will be regenerated and she will be able to live her life energetically again. I accept that the way to be healed can be either healing from God or recovery after the surgery. I believe that both are God's plan.

We at Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship also have people who are suffering from

illnesses. We want to keep praying with hope. It is not wrong to ask for a miracle. In fact, I've come to think that not asking for it might be unbelief. How about you? Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you;"

And today's four people are also the church. The church is the body of Christ, a community that grows together. Ephesians 2:21-22, "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit." Just as the church grows on the foundation of Jesus Christ, we believers also grow by supporting each other.

At the Sunday service, everyone in our church prays every week for Tsutomu-san, who is currently fighting an illness, Kanamaru-san's husband, Sanehiro-san, Sakashita-san, the daughter in law of Mrs. Yoko Ogden, Rie-san's father, and my mother. I believe that God is very pleased with this prayer of faith. Just as the four peoples broke through the ceiling and brought the man with the paralytic to Jesus, we want to be key people to our families, friends, and brothers and sisters in the church. God is very pleased to work through our prayers and efforts. I pray that through our prayers and support, people around us will be blessed and miracles will happen, and that the joy will not only be for us, but for many others. I pray that today's message will be a great hope for those who are in need of a miracle.

Let's pray together.

Reference

- 1) How to Pray: R. A. Torrey, NCM2JAPAN, 1996
- 2) Kotoba (word, dabar): Riki Koshio and Shogo Yamatani, Bible Theological Dictionary, p191, Shinkyō Shuppansha, 2004
- 3) The testimony of the Full gospel Church in Tegu in Korea, by Youtube, May, 2021