

Luke 1:39–45 (NRSV)

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mark 2:1–12 (NRSV)

When he [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ²So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷"Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk?' ¹⁰But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." ¹²And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Sharing home is God's way and our own.

Thanksgiving was a bit different for us this year. Patti and I were invited to our son and daughter-in-law's home for Thanksgiving. Now, that isn't different. Courtney cooks for us almost every year. But a few days before the big meal, Courtney told us she had invited some friends from the neighborhood to join us. It turns out that several families of Canadian ex-pats lived nearby. They didn't really know much about Thanksgiving nor did they have any family in the area. So Courtney decided to open her home, to share her home, on Thanksgiving. And it was a grand day.

That is the theme for this study and this week's sermons – sharing our home. Certainly, in the immediate sense, but also in the sense of sharing with others our home in Christ, as brothers and sisters. There are a number of Bible stories that come to mind; we've chosen two. Jesus is in both.

Two pregnancies

Mary of Nazareth was engaged to marry Joseph when she was visited by the angel Gabriel; she was understandably perplexed by the angel's visit. Despite Mary's virginity, Gabriel told her that God's Holy Spirit would come upon her. She would conceive and give birth to a child to be named Jesus and called the Son of God. Her son would be given the throne of David and a kingdom that would have no end. To all this Mary simply replied, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Probably not long thereafter, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth in her home, who was also miraculously pregnant after Gabriel visited her husband. Now they meet. One woman is old, but now pregnant long after giving up hope. The other is young and unmarried, but now pregnant and carrying the hope of Israel. Joy floods the room. At the mere sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby leaps in her womb. Elizabeth herself is nearly overcome with the power of it all . . . she knows that Mary is the mother of her Lord. Elizabeth has opened her home to her young cousin. Could she really do anything else? Many years later, Mary's son would open his home to another in need.

Coming to Jesus

Capernaum was the hometown of Peter and became Jesus' "headquarters" during his public ministry. Once, Jesus' home was packed to overflowing with so many people that you couldn't have even gotten through the front door. This seemed to pose an insurmountable problem for anyone who wanted to get to Jesus but hadn't been able to enter the house. Insurmountable, that is, unless you have the right kind of friends. Committed friends. Going-above-and-beyond friends.

One paralyzed man from the area had such friends. When they saw the overcrowding, surely the friends were tempted to simply turn away and try again another time. After all, what could they do? They wanted to help their stricken friend, but they couldn't walk through walls. Or could they?!

I wonder who first had the idea to lower the paralyzed man through a hole cut in the ceiling. It must have sounded crazy. "Cut a hole in the roof? Are you mad? Jesus is down there. It's his house!" Yet somehow, the idea took hold among this circle of friends. They climbed up on the roof, hauling the crippled man with them. They dug through the dirt piled on the house's roof and made an opening through which they lowered their friend right in front of Jesus.

It's a safe bet that the friends were focused only on the man's paralysis. That's what needed fixing, after all. But the man got more than freedom from his paralysis, he got freedom from his bondage to sin. When the man was set down on the floor of the room, Jesus told him that his sins had been forgiven, not that his paralysis had been healed.

It is important to grasp the significance and the shock in what Jesus told the paralytic. Sins are offenses committed against God; thus, for the Jews, it was only the Lord God, who could forgive sins. Further, the Jews had a perfectly fine system for managing sin and that was the temple, not some dusty house in Capernaum.

So, as the paralyzed man lay on the floor and the befuddled friends peered down through the hole in the roof, some of the religious authorities (in this case, some scribes) jumped on Jesus about his claim to be forgiving the man's sins. Didn't Jesus understand that he was claiming to exercise a power reserved to God?

Of course Jesus understood. He knew exactly what he was doing. But he also knew that anyone could utter the words, "Your sins are forgiven." So, in order that everyone would see that he was not just saying the words but had been given the authority by God to forgive sins, Jesus told the paralytic to get up and walk. It had to be a delayed yet welcome relief for the man and his friends.

I wonder what was running through the once-paralyzed man's head as he walked outside the house to meet up with his friends. Was he thinking about the fact that he was walking!? Was he thinking about what his friends had done for him? Was he thinking about the man he had just met? All he had wanted was to walk again but he had gotten far more than that.

Jesus had shared his home with many that day, but especially the paralytic who was healed in every sense of the word. The astonishing thing is that Jesus has invited us to

offer healing as well. To care for the ill, provide for the needy, to welcome others into our home and invite them to meet their Savior. Let's really do it this Christmas!

Daily Bible Readings

More on sharing home

Monday, Genesis 18:1-15 Abraham and Sarah open their home to three strangers.

Tuesday, Exodus 40:34-38 God takes residence in the dwelling place built by his people.

Wednesday, 2 Samuel 9 King David opens his home to Mephibosheth.

Thursday, 2 Kings 4:8-37 A Shunammite woman builds an apartment for Elisha atop her home.

Friday, Acts 4:32-37 The first believers share all they have for the good of everyone.

Saturday, Acts 16:11-15 Lydia opens her home to Paul and his companions.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Acts.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: The Good News in *A Christmas Carol*

Coming January 13: *Embracing the Bible: an introduction to Scripture*