

**Choice - Change - and Accountability**  
**Fourth Sermon in Series of Eight: God's Toolbox For Healthy Living**  
**Rev. Ike Parker, Pastor All Saints Christ's Church United**

**Text: Mark 2:1-12**

**INTRODUCTION:**

One day an old alley cat in his wanderings saw an interesting sight. A young alley cat was running around and around trying to catch its own tail. He watched in frustration for a long time. When the young alley cat finally stopped to catch his breath, the old alley cat asked, "Would you mind telling me what your are doing?" "The young alley cat said, "Certainly. I went to Cat Philosophy School and learned that happiness is in our tails. I am going to keep chasing my tail because someday I will catch it and get a great big bite of happiness." The old alley cat said, "Well, I have never been to Cat Philosophy School, but I know it is true that happiness is in our tails. However, I have found that when I just wander around enjoying life, it follows me everywhere I go."

So you see, what matters is where you are looking to find your sense of happiness, health, and well-being. Question is, are you looking for those outside of yourself or inside yourself? Is your focus external or internal? Do you make choices based on what is beyond you (circumstances, issues, experiences, other persons) or do you make choices from what is within you? Where is the location of the center in which you make the decisions and choices of your life? Keep in mind that the choices we make do two things: One - they change and determine how we live, and secondly, our choices hold us accountable.

The text for today's message is Mark 2:1-12 and it is the story of the paralytic whose friends bring him to Christ for his healing. Their choices, changed his life, and through them, Christ held them all accountable. This is the story of a man who could not walk. All that he could do is lie on a mat and depend on the good will of others. Looking at his friends, who carried him through the streets to the home where Jesus was, we can learn much.

First of all, they look at the paralytic and his lot in life from an internal perspective rather than just an external one. They didn't see a helpless man without hope, but rather one whose condition could be changed. It was a matter of getting him to the source of his healing. These others understood the source of the healing to be Christ so they lifted him up and took him to where Christ was. When they arrived, the crowd had filled the house and was overflowing all around the place. Isn't that interesting, they followed the right crowd to the right person. Too often, we follow the wrong crowd to the wrong places, because we are focusing on what the crowd tells us will make us complete and happy. We are focusing on what we believe externally will bring fulfillment. (Chasing our tails.) These chose to follow that which motivated them from within.

Once they arrived at the home and seeing the crowd with the impossible circumstance keeping them from getting to Christ, they could just as easily said, “Oh well, too bad, we tried.” The external view might have given the reason to give up. Again, how often do we let those even within the crowd seeking the Christ, hold us back as we look on the outside circumstances?

But these fellows would not be deterred. They wouldn't let the outside view keep them from seeing inside. They were there to effect a change in the condition of the one they carried and for whom they cared. Living from their inside view, with heart of compassion, they were willing to take the risks that were necessary to make the change that was needed. So they went up on the roof of the house, out on the limb so to speak.

It's risky business living from within and claiming your personal influence. It's easier to live under the misperception (false perception, false belief) that circumstances outside of you, people outside of you, beyond your control determine your choices and decisions. But healthy people know, they control the belief system and right to choose within themselves. And healthy people are willing to take the risks involved in making choices that change their lives. They know that the choices they make will both change their lives and hold them accountable. The way to healing and health is the way of personal choice, change, and accountability.

Persons who are less healthy put their faith in fate or luck and are frequently defeated as they face choices. When persons live under the control of the externals they take on the victim mentality, believing themselves to be passive victims of outside events. Living this way, people usually take one of three paths:

1. Continually feel depressed at their failure in finding success and happiness outside of themselves.
2. Run on a treadmill all their lives while harboring the hope that someday they will find fulfillment somewhere out there.
3. Live a life of rebellion, seeking a false sense of power.

In contrast, people who believe (perceive - have a belief system that tells them) that they have personal influence from within, take personal responsibility, make choices, and change in ways that change their experiences and behaviors for the better health and way of living.

The men carrying the paralytic to Jesus on that day didn't let the crowds stop them. They took the risk, climbed up on the roof of the house, and began removing the tiles that separated the needy from the one with the plan to meet that individual's needs. They had a plan, they were determined, and they took the risk.

Now roofs in those days were different from our roofs today. They were basically made of straw, clay, and mud or of tiles made of those substances. Those tiles could be removed. With a little work and effort, those determined folks had the tiles up and they lowered their friend down into the presence of the healer. They knew the secrets of having a strong internal location and a healthy perception of their power to choose, risk, and change.

Stephen Glenn and Jane Nelsen point out the following about persons with such healthy perception about themselves. These persons believe that “while I cannot always control what happens to me, I can usually influence how I deal with things and events that happen in my life. What I experience is largely a result of the decisions I make and the effort I put forth. I believe I can usually find a way to work out problems or improve relationships, often by talking to people. I believe that a correlation exists between what I do and what I experience, between the effort I put forth and the rewards I reap from life. (What I sow I will reap). And when I can’t influence what happens, I believe I can still decide how I will let circumstances affect me. (Where I go my tail follows me and I am happy).”

Key to all of this is found in the location of ones belief system. That system of perception that tells one who they are. Beliefs can empower us to make choices of change and take the risks necessary to accomplish the changes. Those fellows believed they could make a difference and they did as they climbed up on the roof, took up the tiles, and lowered their friend to the presence of the source of change, the Christ.

And what did Jesus see and do? Don’t miss this: “When Jesus saw their faith” (Whose Faith? The faith of the friends, faith from within that empowered them to make the changes necessary)... “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” WHAT??? What was that he said? The scribes sitting around questioned where? In their hearts (internal belief system) questioned what? Why does this man speak this way, of all things, forgiving sins, only God can forgive sins. And Jesus knows that in their internal belief systems (heart) their question confronts them.

“Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?” And you and I are asked that today. Who do we believe Christ is in our hearts? Is he merely human or divine and human? Can he forgive sins? Of all the choices of life, our choice of belief about who Jesus is, is the most important, most significant one we will ever make. Once confronted with the question, who do we say Christ is, we then become accountable for the answer we choose. Here again, the choice changes us and at the same time holds us accountable. It is a choice of the heart and to our heart’s choice regarding Christ, we must be true and our behaviors exhibit our choice.

Christ further asks, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’” You see the paralytic needed forgiveness from sin and the fringe benefit was the healing of his legs. Christ said, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin . . . I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.

And the people were amazed when that was exactly what the fellow did. They glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.” But does the crowd understand that it was the choices of the friends from an internal belief system that they could make a difference, that they could make choices, that effect change, for which they were accountable, that would cause Christ to see their faith and proclaim the healing from sin?

There's power in this true story. Oh yes, there is the healing power of Christ that made a paralyzed man walk. But the power behind the belief, the faith, to bring the change was in the persons, who believed they had personal influence to act in ways to bring change to the circumstances and the events so that forgiveness and healing could take place.

What do you believe about your life? Do you believe in your power to make a difference in your life and the lives of others through choices of change that hold you accountable? Have you made a heart choice of believing in the Christ and living in the power of Christ's Holy Spirit? Are you living from the inside out with confidence and strength? Let us pray.

Song: "Only believe, Only believe, all things are possible only believe."  
"Only believe, Only believe, All Things Are Possible Only Believe."