

We Carry each other
Mark 2:1-12

In the summer of 2016,
 a group of friends from Indiana decided they wanted to see Europe.
 They were all guys in their twenties,
 and all the adventurous type,
 so they figured they'd make it a backpacking trip.
 So that's what they did, these seven guys.
 They set off with their backpacks to see France and England,
 Wales and Ireland.
 And you know what? They had a fantastic time.

So — how nice for them,
 these guys that you don't know & I've never met....?
 Why am I telling you this story
 about a bunch of friends from Indiana doing what thousands of friends do every
 summer, backpack through Europe?

Well, it's because of what was in one of their backpacks.
 Actually, **who** was in one of their backpacks.

You see, these seven friends weren't your typical bunch of backpacking tourists.
 One of them, Kevan, had — has — a debilitating disease called spinal muscular atrophy.
 He's been in a wheelchair since 3rd grade,
 all the muscles in his arms and legs are completely atrophied.
 Kevan wanted to see Europe, too,
 but he knew that traveling with his friends would be impossible —
 the places they wanted to go would be inaccessible by wheelchair.

So here's what we'll do, his friends said.
*We'll **carry** you, Kevan. We'll carry you with us.*

Kevan's disease, with its withering effects,
 means that his body weighs less than a hundred pounds,
 so his friends knew they could do it. Somehow.
 They went to REI and bought a hiking backpack,

and started tinkering with it.
 And they made a Kevan-size backpack,
 like you'd carry a kid in, only bigger.

On the day they flew to Europe,
 they left Kevan's wheelchair behind.
 And everywhere that they went, Kevan went with them.
 Carried up the stairs of Montmartre to look out over the City of Lights.
 Carried along the cobblestone streets of English villages.
 And carried, amazingly, up the six hundred steps of Skellig Michael,
 a monastery built on the side of an Irish mountain.

Two years later, this group of friends did it again.
 Carried Kevan, this time, to the other side of the world,
 where they climbed along the Great Wall of China
 and gazed together at one of the world's most astonishing views.

Those friends, with Kevan, have started a charity now,
 a foundation dedicated to making the world more accessible to all.

We Carry Kevan, it's called.

Kevan said this, in an interview recently:

"If you think about it, accessibility is just people helping people.
 We can't do this alone, any of us, whether it's a trip somewhere, or *life*.
 Nobody can do it on their own.
 We need each other."

The scripture story that Carolyn just read to us
 is all about someone who needed his friends to carry him –
 as literally as Kevan's friends did.

It's the story of a man who is healed by Jesus,
 so yes, it's a story of healing and miracle,
 but it's the *way* the healing happens that's the real story,
 because nothing happens in this story without people who were determined to make
 sure that Christ's love was accessible to all.

In a town called Capernaum,
 long long ago,

friends of a sick man heard that healing had come to town,
heard that Jesus was back.

They knew that if they could only get their friend close to him,
if they could only get him into Jesus' presence,
then everything would be all right.

They also knew that the only way to do that was to carry him,
because he was paralyzed.

So that's what they do – they carry him.

No backpack from REI for them, of course,
instead, they pick up their friend's bed and start carrying him across town,
to where the crowds have gathered and Jesus is speaking.

Then it gets complicated.

Jesus isn't out on some hillside,
he's not in the town square, he's in someone's home,
and the crowd is unbelievable –
the house is packed, people leaning in the windows,
pressed up against the outside walls.

“Could you let us through?” they try asking, their arms aching.

“Excuse me, could you let us get to Jesus?”

It would be nice to report that the crowd stood aside
and made way for them, but they didn't;
nobody wanted to lose their spot, I guess.

But the friends refuse to give up.

Their tenacity and determination
are matched only by their complete faith:
the faith that tells them that if they can get him there,
if they can carry him in somehow,
their friend, whom they love, will be healed. Somehow.

So what do they do? They go up on the roof.

Flat roofs then, no cedar shingles to scramble up,
but still and all, the roof.

And they start tearing it up,

which means, of course, that down below,

Jesus, mid-sermon, is soon immersed in a shower of dirt and tile,
as are all the people crammed in there with him.

Looking up, astonished, they see sunlight
 starting to break through the ceiling in a widening and widening hole,
 revealing these guys, these crazy guys,
 pulling up the roof.

The story doesn't give us the homeowner's reaction,
 but it's not too hard to imagine.

And then,
 something, someone, is lowered through the hole,
 carefully, carefully, by these guys whose love and faith have carried their friend
 across the town, through the crowd, up a roof, and through the ceiling.

And here's the key line.

The story says that when Jesus saw *their faith* —
 the faith of those friends, the love of those crazy friends,
 when Jesus saw their faith ... in that moment their friend was healed.
 In our Bibles, the story is usually entitled “the healing of a paralytic” —
 but in truth, it should be called ‘the faith of friends’ —
 friends whose belief and love
carried someone to healing.
 The story is about the carrying.
 The story is about the carrying.

Three nights ago our teenagers heard from a young man not too much older than they
 are,

a man named Daniel Trust.

Daniel was born in Rwanda,

to a father from the Hutu tribe and a mother who was Tutsi.

Five years after he was born came the horror of the Rwandan genocide,
 which took the lives of his parents —

his mother killed for simply being Tutsi, his father for marrying her.

Daniel, orphaned, was rescued by a neighbor,
 and ended up a refugee in Zambia.

After years of waiting, Daniel was sent to Bridgeport, Connecticut.

At Bassick High School, he excelled, thrilled by the chance to be in school and to learn.

Then he worked his way through Southern
 and graduated just a few years ago.

And here's what he does now.

Daniel has taken it as his life's work to mentor kids in Bridgeport who need the presence of love as greatly as he did.

"There were so many who helped me along the way,"

he told us, "so many who carried me.

There were people who lifted me out of the dark times, and gave me hope again.

Now I want to do that for others."

And he does.

Daniel, just thirty years old, has already created mentorships for hundreds of young people in Bridgeport.

This young man who lived through one of the greatest darknesses there has been is now lifting others into the light,

carrying others into the presence of hope and healing.

To carry others is what we are called to do.

To carry others to healing is what we are meant to do.

In this world around us, and right here in our church family.

Two Sundays ago, in our Sunday Morning 'Sports Worship,'

Mikey Lau, who was confirmed here just last May,

and played freshman football at Hopkins,

Mike stood up here and said this:

"a church," he said, "is like a team.

We have to help each other, watch for each other.

You can't do faith by yourself,

it would be really hard to do this all by yourself.

In church we help each other out."

He's right.

Faith is not a solo endeavor.

When you hit a rough patch, you need people around you who will carry you through.

And when you're the one who's strong, you're needed to hold someone else up.

We carry each other through.

We carry each other. That's what we do here.

Not long after I came to this church, a woman came to see me in my office.

I still remember our conversation.

She said, "I love worshipping here,

I want to join this church and be a part of all this.

But I don't think I should," she said,

"because I don't think it would be right."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"I have nothing to give right now," she said,

"I'm just wiped out."

She was a single mom, she was changing jobs,

her parents were both struggling with illness,

and the kids were hitting adolescence.

And she wasn't entirely sure where God was in all this mess;

faith had taken a significant nosedive.

"I have nothing to give right now," she repeated,

"I'm tired in every way.

So it doesn't seem fair to everyone else for me to keep coming here,

since honestly, I just need to be carried for awhile.

I just need people to carry me for a while."

She kept coming, because I told her to.

She was carried, because that's the way it works in a church.

And when she became strong, as she did, she carried others.

The truth is that there is no Sunday here

when there aren't plenty of people in this room –

all of us sometimes – who are feeling like they are tired in every way.

People who are not sure what or whether they believe –

People who maybe feel like the faith that they once had, they put down somewhere,

and now can't remember where to go back and find it.

So why do we come here on those Sundays? To be carried.

To find strength.

To hear faith proclaimed even when ours is shaky;

to hear the prayers of others when ours are struggling to find voice;

to sing out our praise, our need, our thanks --

because in the singing and the hearing and the speaking
 we are carried,
 by the faith around us that is strong and true,
 by the friends around us who, like us,
 seek and believe and falter and believe again.

We carry each other. That's what we do here.
 We carry each other into the presence of Jesus.
 We carry each other into the place of healing.
 We offer strength enough for each other's weakness;
 and sometimes we offer the weakness that yearns for another's strength.
 We carry each other.

And when we go out from this place,
 when we leave these walls,
 we look for others who need to be carried.
 We take the strength that we find here
 and in that strength we find the others who need to be held,
 lifted up into love, carried to healing.
 Like Daniel Trust does now.
 Like so many of you who are at work in this community and this world already in
 countless ways,
 lifting others up,
 carrying them to hope.

Kevan Chandler, whose story began this sermon,
 who was carried by his friends and now carries so many others,
 Kevan wrote this to sum up that first journey, and the journey that continues:
 "My friends," he said, "were driven by the love of Christ to carry me,
 literally carry me, through the impossible.
 And it wasn't because I'm cool
 or because I'm an inspiration to them.
 It was because of a true love beyond themselves. [...]
 My friends and I went on a trip,
 and they carried me in a backpack, because we loved each other.
 All around the world,
 there are people looking to love and be loved,

longing to invite and to be invited,
searching for hope and hoping for something more. [...] This truly is what it's all about.”

We carry each other.

We, the friends who pick up the mat and carry –
this is what we are here to do for one another
and for our world.

We carry each other into the place of healing,
we carry each other into the presence of Christ,
And sometimes we too are carried.

This is love.

This is church.

This is faith.

Amen.