

Whatever It Takes

Mark 2:1-2

Joan Unger wrote in *Guideposts* magazine several years ago (May 1980) of a special moment she shared with her son one school morning. While the bus was coming up the hill, Mrs. Unger and her son watched through his bedroom window as a fat blue jay worked persistently to build a nest. They were fascinated by this close up view as the mother bird flew back and forth, finding materials for the nest, then working to weave them in.

There was one piece of twine which seemed to give the bird a bit of trouble. Just as she would fly back to the branch she had chosen for her new home, the twine fell from her bill. Three times that piece of string fell to the ground as the blue jay tried to make it part of her nest, and three times she went down and picked it up, before she was finally successful.

That afternoon, when Mrs. Unger's son bounced off the school bus, he waved a math paper in the air. As he showed it to his mother, he said, "She gave us a really hard problem, Mom, but I just kept thinking of that bird. I did it over and over and I was the only one who got it right!" Mrs. Unger's article in *Guideposts* was appropriately entitled, "Thanks, Mrs. Blue Jay."

Most of the greatest events in history have been accomplished by those rare individuals who had a dream, and committed themselves to the fulfillment of that dream, no matter what it cost. Thomas Edison was one of them. It is said that he failed ten thousand times before he was successful in inventing the light bulb. Someone asked him in later years "How do you face ten thousand failures?" He replied, "I only found ten thousand ways to make the light bulb not work." And today, we are grateful to Mr. Edison because he remained true his dream, whatever it took.

When you pick up the Gospel of Mark, you don't read very far until you come to the story of the four men who carried a helpless friend of theirs to Jesus that he might be healed of his paralysis. They wanted their friend healed whatever it took. It is truly a touching story, but it is much more than that. Across these centuries their example demonstrates for us three requirements to bring people to Christ in our day.

1 We must share the same concern, v. 3

In verse three we read, “*Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.*” It is possible that a group of people accompanied this paralyzed man, but four of them carried him, evidently each one bearing a corner of the mat upon which he lay. I don’t believe we are reading too much into the Scripture to say that these people shared a common concern for this paralyzed friend.

They had probably helped him in other ways and at other times. The needs of a person in that condition are many. In an age when there were no wheelchairs, or hydraulic lifts or even physical therapy as we know it today, the needs of one who was paralyzed were further complicated. These people who cared for this paralytic were motivated to action by their common concern for him.

When Jesus came to town, the news spread rapidly. Verse one reads, “*A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come.*” The King James Version reads that “*it was noised*” that Jesus had returned. Now was the time for them to act. Jesus had been to Capernaum before, and many had been healed on that trip. These friends had to do something quickly if their paralyzed friend on that mat were to be helped, and they were willing to do whatever was necessary.

Concern for people is at the very foundation of any effort to introduce them to Christ. It was true in the days Mark describes in his gospel; it is no less true today. Before we can reach out to people who are lost spiritually, or to people who are indifferent to the things of the Spirit of God, there has to be a concern for them and their relationship to Jesus Christ. The church with a concern for others built into its programs, ministries and activities is the church with a mission!

This concern motivates us to do whatever it takes. A young man came from the Philippines to study law at one of our universities. His first night on the campus, a student came to see him, and said to him, “I’ve come to welcome you to the campus, and to say that if there’s anything I can do to help make your stay here more pleasant, I hope you’ll call on me.”

Then the student asked the Filipino about his faith, and the Filipino told him of his affiliation. The American student replied, “Well, that church is not easy to find, but I can tell you where it is. Let me draw you a map.” So the student drew him a map and left.

The next morning, the rain was coming down in sheets. The Filipino thought to himself, “I won’t go to church this morning. It’s my first Sunday on the campus, it’s raining hard, the church is hard to find...I’ll get some more sleep.” But then there was a knock on the door.

When he crawled out of bed and opened the door, there was the student who had visited him the night before. His raincoat was dripping wet, and on one arm he had two umbrellas. He said, “I thought you might have a hard time finding your church, especially in the rain. I will walk along with you and show you where it is.” As the Filipino dressed to go, he thought, “What kind of fellow is this? If this fellow is so concerned about my religion, I ought to know something about his.”

As they walked along in the rain under the two umbrellas, the Filipino asked, “Where do you go to church?” The American student replied, “Oh, it’s just around the corner.” So the Filipino said, “Suppose we go to your church today, and we’ll both go to my church next Sunday.” The Filipino told someone afterwards that he never did go to his church. He eventually received a calling from God to enter the ministry, and after seminary, was appointed to go back to the Philippines.

Christianity has always been one generation away from extinction. So far, it has been faithfully spread by people who are like that young American student with two umbrellas—so concerned about the spiritual condition of others that they have been willing to bring people to Christ whatever it takes. Bringing people to Christ in our day and in our area requires that we share the same concern for those who do not have the joy of salvation in their lives, and that that concern motivates us to do whatever it takes to see that others have the opportunity to know Christ.

2 We must share the same convictions, v. 3

This group of people, as well as the paralytic, shared a conviction about this man Jesus. Their understanding of Who He was or why He came certainly wasn’t refined, but they knew that something was different about Him. They believed that Jesus had the power to make a difference for this paralyzed friend of theirs.

When Jesus had come to Capernaum on His first trip (Mark 1:21ff), He had gone to the synagogue and begun to teach. While He was speaking, a man who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, “*What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!*” At a word from Jesus, the evil spirit came out of that man with a shriek. The

people were so amazed that the news about Jesus began to spread quickly over the entire region.

Beginning in 1:29, there is the story of how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law from a very high fever, and how she got up and began to wait on them. When the word got out, verse 33 records that *"the whole town gathered at the door"* with their sick and demon-possessed.

Beginning in 1:40, we see the story of the man with leprosy who came to Jesus and said, *"If you are willing, you can make me clean."* The Bible says that Jesus was filled with compassion and said, *"I am willing. Be clean!"* But Jesus gave him a strong warning not to tell anyone what had happened to him, because people would miss the point of why He came. But 1:45 tells us that instead, the man *"went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news."*

All this was going on around them. The rumors darted in and out the door of the house where the paralytic lived, and he could do nothing about them! He couldn't even get up to see if the rumors were true! Can't you just imagine the paralyzed man on his mat dreaming with a tear in his eye of the remote possibility that one day he, too, might be healed? But no, it was certainly too much to hope for!

The stories were told and retold, and by the time Jesus returned to Capernaum a few days later, the friends of this paralyzed man had begun to believe in this man Jesus and His power to heal. Perhaps—perhaps! These friends had even been among those healed by Jesus on His earlier visit! That's just speculation, of course, but interesting, nevertheless. They believed Jesus could heal this paralyzed friend, too, if they could only get him there. They shared a common conviction!

Bringing people to Jesus requires that we share a conviction that is five-fold in nature:

- (1) **We must share the conviction that Jesus is God.** The Scripture says in Colossians 2:9, *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."*
- (2) **We must share the conviction that Jesus is Lord.** Paul wrote that people worshipped all kinds of false gods, *"yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live"* (1 Corinthians 8:6).
- (3) **We must share the conviction that Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin.** We are told in 2 Corinthians 5:15 that Jesus *"died for all, that*

those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them....”

- (4) We must share the conviction that Jesus conquered death so we might live.** Peter wrote in his aging years, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Peter 1:3).
- (5) We must share the conviction that Jesus is coming again.** Paul wrote to Titus that we should live godly lives *“while we wait for the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13).

Without these basic convictions, our message to the people around us is watered down. It becomes ineffective and useless. No one has ever been reached for Christ with vague, mealy-mouthed apologetic platitudes. The only way you and I can bring people to Christ in our day is for us to share the same convictions about Who Christ is, why He came, what He did while He was here, and that He is one day coming back. Anything less than that robs the message of Christ of its power.

3 We must share the same creative persistence, v. 4

When the four friends carrying their paralyzed friend arrived at the house where Jesus was, there were so many people in and around the house that they could not even get in the door. It would seem that their hopes for helping their friend had been dashed to the ground, never to be revived. They may have stood there momentarily, wondering what to do, or perhaps crushed with disappointment. They may have even turned to go home. But at least one of them had an idea. It was crazy, but it might work!

Most homes were constructed with flat roofs, which were used in many practical ways. Sometimes a tent was pitched on the roof, where a person could be shielded from the sun, yet cooled by the breezes. Sometimes flax was spread there to dry. One gained access to the roof by a set of stairs on the outside of the house and attached to one of the walls. So these four friends, who shared a little creative persistence, climbed the stairs and began to do something which could have upset a lot of people.

You see, they began to dig a hole in the roof. Keep in mind that the roofs then were not constructed as they are now, and could easily be taken apart. But think for just a minute about those inside the house. Think about the owner of the house, who may have been Peter. Here they are, soaking up the teachings of Jesus, when they are showered by dirt and debris falling from above. The owner’s astonishment turns to anger as he realizes what is happening. The others may have been angry

because this time with Jesus was being rudely interrupted! What these men were doing was unorthodox! It was unheard of! It was crazy!

But look again! These men on the roof were concerned that their friend be helped, whatever it took. It just so happened that it took the removal of the roof. Mark says literally that they “unroofed the roof.” Quite a description for what happened that day! But their decision to dig a hole in the roof, even though everyone did not agree nor understand, was one originating in creative persistence. They were determined to help their friend, and used their creativity to reach that goal.

Listen! Not everyone can be brought to Christ the same way or with the same methods! If we are going to reach people with the message of Christ, then we are going to have to share the same creative persistence—creatively being persistent, and persistently being creative. We’ve got to keep looking for ways to communicate the Gospel, whatever it takes, even if we’ve never done it that way before.

We’ve got reach out to people, whatever it takes. We’ve got to look for ways to involve more people in outreach, whatever it takes. It may mean that you and I have to be inconvenienced a little bit that we should take the time to visit or make a phone call or write a note to someone. It may mean that you have to listen to music you don’t like in order that people who do like that kind of music may be saved. It may mean that we have activities at our church that you think are unnecessary. But “whatever it takes” should become our motto for reaching people for Christ!

We’re talking about picking up those who are paralyzed in a spiritual sense and introducing them to Jesus, Who alone has the power to save. It may take something totally unheard of. It may take something I personally don’t like or have no taste for. But if in the process, people are won to Christ, then I have to be reminded that *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”* Crucified people are dead people, and dead people don’t have opinions.

To make it happen here, we must be willing to *give* whatever it takes, to *do* whatever it takes, and to *become* whatever it takes. We must share the same concern for people, the same convictions about Jesus Christ, and the same creative persistence for finding ways to win people to Christ.

This is a personal matter. You can’t hide in the crowd thronged around the door. Climb up on the roof and start digging. Lower your attitudes and dreams and commitments to the feet of Jesus. Then watch what He does with them!