

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, February 22, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"JESUS IS IN THE HOUSE!"

Mark 2:1

During the early part of his ministry Jesus had his home base in the village of Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that after a preaching and healing mission Jesus returned to Capernaum and it was reported that he was at home, back in the house he was using as a temporary residence.

Now I'm glad we're having such a positive response to our upcoming "Elvis is in the House" concert. But look at the response in Capernaum when they said "Jesus is in the house!" Mark tells us that so 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. Jesus' presence made that house into a very special place and the people just couldn't stay away. Wouldn't we love to see that here in our church - so many gathered together that they not only fill up our pews but overflow right out into the street?

But this is not just an ancient story. Every Sunday as we gather together for worship we can say, "Jesus is in the house!" For Jesus promises that where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." And the presence of the living Christ transforms this house of worship into a very special place. Sometimes we take the church for granted. But today as we prepare for our annual congregational meeting I want us to think about how Christ's presence transforms this church into a very special place for us and for the community. Doing this may also remind us what we give the church our very best and why we seek to make this a welcoming place. And it starts here - when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. "Jesus is in the house!"

First of all, Jesus' presence makes this a house of fellowship.

This is really a remarkable episode in Jesus' ministry that Mark records in 2:1-12. As Jesus stood there speaking to the crowd, a great commotion suddenly took place among him, beams splintering, people covering their heads and trying to get out of the way as packed dirt, now set free, came crashing down into the room. And what happened next was even more remarkable. Down Into Jesus' presence came a paralyzed man lowered by four of his friends, each

holding a rope attached to the corners of the pallet. Unable to bring their paralysed friend into Jesus midst through the crowd, these men found an effective, if unorthodox way of doing it. They climbed the stairs on the outside of the house, broke open the roof, and let him down. The roof could be fixed, but they realized that their paralysed friend's only hope was to come into Jesus' presence. What a picture of friendship, of support, of determination, of going the second mile for someone in need. That's the kind of fellowship Jesus' presence always inspires.

Notice Mark says that when Jesus saw "their faith". Not the man's faith, but the friends' faith, he said to them, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Incredible, isn't it? Jesus acted on the basis of the friends' faith to help the man. In the church people who are going through a valley of doubt or despair can be supported by those whose faith is strong. And frankly we all pass through times when we are weak and we must lean on those who are strong.

Now we become Christian by personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, but we can't stay as Christians or grow as Christians in isolation from one another. Christianity is not meant for lone-wolves. So we come together to support and encourage one another, to bring one another to Jesus, to pray for one another, to laugh and cry together, to help one another in time of need, to sharpen another in faith and wisdom and knowledge, to make that caring phone call or to write that encouraging letter. The church's fellowship is far from perfect, but when the church pulls together as a loving, caring, encouraging community, we are able to bring one another into Jesus' presence. How much poorer we would be without the church's fellowship! Jesus brings us together. His presence here makes this a house of fellowship.

Secondly, Jesus presence makes this a house of forgiveness.

The first thing Jesus said to the paralysed man was, "My son, your sins are forgiven!" Perhaps Jesus perceived that the man's deepest need was the forgiveness of his sins. It's even possible that his paralysis was linked to an overwhelming sense of sin and guilt. Now some scribes thought to themselves, "This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Well, it was a good question, but in Mark's Gospel Jesus always acted with the very authority and power of God. And as a demonstration of his divine authority, and to prove that the man's sins really were forgiven, Jesus said, "Take up your pallet and walk." And so he did.

Now we may not be bound up by sin and guilt as this man apparently was, but forgiveness of sin is our deepest need. Of course, God's law is wonderful and we

need it, and should strive to keep it. But God's law not only brings freedom; understood right God's law reveals us as sinners who fall short of God's requirements and so become separated from God.

Two weeks ago I spoke of that Simpson's TV episode where Homer Simpson tells God that he stays home from church because "It's so boring and all they do is tell me how bad I am." But it shouldn't be like that. Yes, God's word does bring our sin to light, but that's not all it does. God's word never leaves us in a state of condemnation and despair. God's word of judgement is joined with God's even greater word of forgiveness. "Where sin abounded, so did grace abound even more." Forgiveness of sins really is our biggest need. For we can't move forward and we can't begin to forgive others until we are forgiven by God and we know it. Indeed, we need to be reconciled with God in order to live in fellowship with God now and in eternity. So Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again to make God's forgiveness available to everyone in every generation. And when you hear and trust Jesus' word, "Your sins are forgiven," you can be sure that you really are forgiven. The power of God's forgiveness in Jesus sets us free from our burden and empowers us to walk more fully in the way of Christ.

One woman asked her minister, "Why do we have a prayer of confession every week. There are some weeks I don't sin." Well, good for her, but every week I need God's forgiveness. Now I know that I am saved once and for all by the blood of Christ, and that I am heaven-bound because I have accepted Christ as my Lord and Saviour. I do not become unsaved and then saved again every week. But every week I get scuffed up and wounded inside by my sin. Every week I need to hear, "Your sins are forgiven," for the health of my mind and soul and even body. Every week I need to be reminded that I am in God's grace. And probably it's the same for you. That's why we have the prayer of confession near the beginning of the service. For we really can't worship in spirit and in truth until we hear these words said to us in the name of Jesus, "Your sins are forgiven."

And when you hear those words and really trust them, then you are strengthened in your willingness and ability to forgive others. I know forgiveness is hard sometimes. Sometimes when you forgive someone in the sense of restoring the relationship, it still takes a long time for you to really trust the person again. That's understandable and it's O.K. But God's forgiveness of us through Jesus begins to melt our hearts and turns us in the direction of forgiveness and reconciliation. In this place, forgiving one another comes into the realm of possibility.

Jesus' presence turns this place into a house of forgiveness. Forgiveness is always in the air when Jesus is near.

Finally, Jesus' presence makes this a house of healing.

Jesus said to the paralysed man, "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." He got up, tucked his pallet under his arm and walked away in front of the astonished crowd. Now I believe that all healing, however it happens, ultimately comes from God's power and by God's provision. God can and certainly does work through doctors, nurses, therapists, drugs, and all the rest to bring healing to our bodies. Thank God for all He provides to make us well.

Now we don't normally think of healing as taking place in the church, at least not the healing of physical illnesses. But in Jesus' presence I believe that our bodies somehow become prepared and more open to the healing God wills for us, no matter how that healing eventually comes.

And certainly here in Jesus' presence healing comes to our souls in a way that perhaps medical science can't bring us. For we come here with not only afflictions in body, but troubles in soul as well, fears and anxieties, doubts and perplexities, loss of purpose and lack of joy. And through worship, prayer, praise and preaching, healing comes that the world cannot give. The God of all comfort brings peace to our hearts and minds. The living Saviour lays his hands upon us and lifts us up. So it has been for millions and so it may be for you. A monster like Josef Stalin may shut down the churches and ban the Bible as he did for years in the Soviet Union. But during the war, when Russians suffered enormous casualties, Stalin opened the churches again. In the face of suffering and death and hardship, he knew that people needed the comfort of faith. The presence of Jesus transforms this into a house of healing.

Perhaps I didn't really have to remind you of these things - that Jesus' presence transforms this place into a house of fellowship, a house of forgiveness, and a house of healing. For you know that. That's what you come here week by week.

But the challenge for the church is this. Are we willing to go the second mile so that people out there may come in and find what we find? Are we prepared to do whatever it takes to bring people in here? I don't mean tearing off the roof and lowering people on pallets. Our property committee would not like that at all. But there is a sense in which the church must be creative and go beyond the usual boundaries in order to bring others into the presence of the living Christ. Are we willing to do that? Does our budget reflect that willingness? Do we gear our activities to that end? We have been creative and determined to tell the community that "Elvis is in the house." Can we be just as creative and determined in saying that "Jesus is in the house?" I hope these questions will be on our minds as we move into our annual meeting later this morning.