



How to walk 4: The paralysed man

By Elizabeth Starr

Owning up to a disability is owning up to the fact that you are not invulnerable. That's what this story reminds me. Having known what it feels like to be full-body paralysed, when I read about the Paralysed Man in Mark 2:1-11 (I've only included Mark 2:2-5 below), it feels personal. I love how Jesus prioritises forgiving the man's sins over healing bodies, but the bit I tend to focus on is not the man, but the man's friends.

'Soon the house where he [Jesus] was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralysed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralysed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."'

If you've ever lain sick in bed with someone sitting worrying beside you, being paralysed feels a bit like that. (I mean how it feels emotionally, not physically). It's incredibly moving for the sick person as well as the visitor. When you're paralysed, all you can do is hold someone's hand and try to tell them through your skin somehow that you're okay, and they've come to comfort you but really you're comforting them. After all, you're more used to being paralysed than they are.

In this story, I wonder whose idea was it to take the man to Jesus? Did four friends just happen to be visiting their friend at the same time when they heard Jesus was nearby? Or did they all hurriedly assemble at the news? These four guys carried their friend (who was no doubt highly embarrassed to be such a spectacle) and when they couldn't get through the crowd, they decided to break through the roof. How did they come to that decision? Who made that call? And was the paralysed man feeling self-conscious that his friends were going to such extreme lengths to get him to Jesus?

I want to love my friends like those four men. I want to be the one who carries them. Be strong. I find it harder to accept sometimes we have to let go of control and let other people carry us. It's easy to want to help the vulnerable. It's much harder to let yourself be vulnerable. It was faith through vulnerability that moved Jesus that day. Is that what acknowledging disability is?

Questions to ask yourself:

- When can I carry my friends?
- When can I let my friends carry me?