

“Fly: Daring New Heights”

While Rev. Dr. Suzanne Adele Schmidt’s congregation was utilizing the Emerge Worship Series Design she explained, **“This week the butterfly has shed its cocoon, learned to fly, and is soaring to new heights.”** “Anything is now possible for that caterpillar who was transformed into a butterfly. Nothing can hold the butterfly back.” (“Fly: Daring New Heights” by Suzanne Adele Schmidt, Ph.D., M.Div. Trinity UCC, Manchester, MD)

We, like the butterfly are called to Fly – Soar – Dare New Heights as we continue our journey of Transformation into the people God intends for us to be. Everyone’s need to receive and share this Good News was lifted up by Rev. Dr. J. Bennett Guess when he wrote, “Many of us have learned first hand that when outdoor church signs boldly proclaim that all are welcome, that is not always the case. There’s a well worn cliché that says the devil is in the details.” **“But I think it is more accurate to say that God is in the details.”** “Because if you really want to know where and how to find God, then you need to examine things at the deepest possible level. Just by looking at the outside of things, you can’t always tell.”

Rev. Guess explained, **“In the life of faith, one of the most difficult roads we ever travel is from the general to the particular.”** “It’s one thing to say we ought to feed hungry people and quite another to give up the next 52 Saturday mornings to do just that. It’s not enough to say your favorite charity sure could use some more money if you’re not willing to write out a check for your fair share. It may sound noble to vehemently defend the Bible as the Word of God, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you ever pick up the thing and read it.” (“God Is in the Details” by Rev. Dr. J. Bennett Guess posted on Day1.org)

Our Scripture helps us to Fly – Soar – Dare the New Heights of our New Lives in Jesus Christ – to follow God’s Example of moving from the “general to the particular” for it presents us several examples. One of those examples was the friends, who lowered the man through the roof. Another example was Jesus himself.

As we consider what those friends did, it is helpful to be aware of how an online resource explained the way the roof was opened during Jesus’ Public Ministry: “A first century home in Palestine had a **flat roof** composed of large stone tiles which were easy to remove and easy to replace. The tiles were sometimes covered with dirt or sod for insulation purposes. So, there was no need to rip up shingles and saw through beams in order to make a sizable opening in the roof!

Also, a first century home had an **outside staircase up to the flat roof**. This enabled the four men to carry their friend and his bed up to the rooftop without spilling him and without employing an elaborate ladder or block and tackle system! The ‘bed,’ of course, was not a heavy inner spring mattress and frame but a lightweight pallet or mattress-like pad. Thus, the hole in the roof was not gigantic in size!” (Growing Christian Ministries, “Through the Roof”, growingchristians.org/devotions/through-the-roof/)

In verse 5a, Jesus recognized the friends were soaring from self-centeredness to agape love – sacrificially caring for their suffering friend. **Referring to Jesus’ observations, the gospel stated, “Seeing how much faith they had”.** It took significant time and the labor of the friends for them to carry the man to the home where Jesus was, to climb the outside steps to the roof while still carrying him, to remove the roof tiles, and then, to lower him down to Jesus. **Their commitment and concern for the man was a good example of living selflessly – of flying – soaring to the new heights of the New Life Jesus was teaching and living.**

That being the case, let’s turn to examining how Jesus’ words and actions provided a dramatic example of the New Life in Christ to the observing public, as well as, to us. One of the most shocking expressions of it was raised when in **verse 5b**, **“Jesus said to the paralyzed man, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven.’”** Now, those words may seem inconsequential to most people but in the Jewish Community of his day, they were scandalous!

The Text stated in verses 6-7, “Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ‘How does he dare talk like this? This is blasphemy! God is the Only One Who can forgive sins!’”

Unfortunately, even in our society, the public thinking about the forgiveness of sins is very legalistic and judgmental. A large segment of those calling themselves Christians believe a sinner cannot be forgiven by anyone, except for God. Further, the popular understanding is “forgiveness” has to be earned. However, Jesus’ words and actions challenged the legalism of the people, especially the religious elite. For example, the Scripture stated in verses 8-12a, **“At once Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said to them, ‘Why do you think such things? Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, pick up your mat, and walk’? I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the paralyzed man, ‘I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home!’ While they all watched, the man got up, picked up his mat, and hurried away.”** Clearly, the healing miracle demonstrated Jesus had and has the authority to forgive sins!

There is a hint in **verse 12b** that there was and is more to Jesus’ radical challenge to the prevailing view on the forgiveness of sins, as Mark reported, **“They were all completely amazed and praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”** The temptation is to believe the response of the crowd was merely with reference to Jesus having performed the healing. Yet, Jesus must have already been perceived to be a “Healer”, since the men brought their friend and lowered him to Jesus. **Instead of merely referring to the healing of the man, the praises of the people were because they were amazed that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins and had proved it through the healing!**

I have additional Good News! Jesus did not hoard the authority to forgive people of their sins. As he told Nicodemus in John 3:17, God did not send him to be the Judge of the World but its Savior! **The Son of God was sent to reveal to everyone the Good News that our Divine Parent has forgiven all of us and wants us and all people to receive and live out the New Faith Relationship with God and one another – the New Life in Jesus Christ.** Specifically, with reference to the Forgiveness of Sin, Jesus extended his authority to the Church – the Body of Christ – to all of us. It is reported in **John 20:22-23, “Then he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”**

Like Jesus Christ, we are called to be conveyors of God’s Good News of Forgiveness, the New Faith Relationship with God and one another, and the New Life in Christ to everyone. Our announcing that to people and treating them as forgiven is crucial to our Rising – Flying – Soaring to the New Heights of God’s Grace and Agape Love! This calling and our God Given Gifts come through the Holy Spirit. **Our God Is Still Speaking Emphasis is the “general” message. How we use our Spiritual Gifts – our Time, Talent, and Abilities is the “particular” for our God Is Still Speaking Emphasis – how we live our lives following the example of the friends of the paralyzed man, of Jesus, and of our Divine Parent!**

During the concluding Worship Celebration of this Emerge Series – in a couple of Sundays, **Pentecost and Personal Dedication Sunday, June 9th, each of us will have the opportunity to prayerfully fill out our Personal Dedication Sheet and commit ourselves to give back significant portions of our Spirit Given Gifts, so as individuals and a congregation, we will “Fly: Daring New Heights” in fulfilling our Calling and our New Lives in Christ!** Let’s commit ourselves to being God’s Children sharing our Divine Parent’s Forgiveness, Grace, Agape Love, and New Life in Christ with many others, especially through the Life and Ministry of Round Grove United Church! Amen.