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Sermon Transcript: Carried by Faith

Well, we had quite a big day yesterday, huh? Big celebration. I don't know what you all did. Did you maybe have a barbecue, right? Or maybe you set off some fireworks or maybe you, you know, sent a card or maybe you dropped off a gift at her house. You know, it was yesterday, the big day. It was Pastor Alex's birthday yesterday. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, Pastor Alex. Happy birthday to you. Woo! She loves attention like this, doesn't she? Oh my goodness. Oh, you thought I was talking about the 4th of July. I mean, it was okay, but can you imagine what it's been like for her whole life? The 4th of July has been her birthday. Don't get me wrong, like, if I was one of her parents, I'd be like, "Oh, yeah. If you're really good this year, they might have fireworks on your birthday again. Maybe there'll even be a parade we could go to." But then I remember that, oh, but she has a sister though, so that would get awkward, you know, because like, "Sorry, guess you're not as good as your sister Alex. They didn't have a firework display for you." Yeah, I guess you can't quite use that technique on you. But I mean, just think about it though, like every time you want to have a birthday party, you're like, "Hey, you want to come over on my birthday?" It's like, "Uh, we got other plans. Something maybe a little bit more exciting than your birthday party. There's fireworks." It's a kind of a shame. Of course, she stuck with the birthday colors of red, white, and blue. Every year, you don't really have a choice when your birthday is the 4th of July. Having to focus on the right thing is challenging in your life, and gets drawn in different areas, and different directions. Our scripture passage today has a similar type of misdirect where it's easy to get your attention caught in the wrong direction.

Ripping Holes in the Roof

Jesus heads—it says that he goes to Capernaum and to his home. So, it's either Jesus had a home here or maybe it was like a home base that the disciples and Jesus kind of operated out of. But either way, he's going to his home and they still wouldn't leave him alone. They're coming to his house to seek his teaching, to seek healing. And it's so crowded that when this group of friends brings their buddy who can't walk, they have to go up on the roof to get to Jesus. Now, it doesn't actually say in the text that these were his friends. You know how I know it is his friends? Because these four dudes carried this person through the crowd, up onto the roof, dug a hole in Jesus's roof. What do you think that was like? You know, they're all sitting there talking. All of a sudden, there's like, "Wait a minute, you—you hear that?" And there's like stuff falling down. All of a sudden they rip it open. You know, I

don't know exactly how Jesus felt about that immediately. How would you feel if someone ripped a hole in your roof just because they couldn't get into your party, right? I don't think insurance covers that kind of damage. See the adjuster out there? He's like, "Okay, now Mr. Christ. I understand there was some kind of incident with some hailing." "Uh, no, actually it was an incident with healing. That's what happened." "Oh. Oh, yeah. We don't cover that. We don't cover that." It's—it's a situation where like it almost seems surreal, but at this moment then these friends lower him down and our attention is on this person being lowered down. But what's interesting is that's not where Jesus's attention is because what he does is it says that he looked at their faith and based on that said to the man who was lowered down, "Your sins are forgiven." He saw *their* faith. And that's the point that sometimes we miss in this story—to recognize that it is their faith that brings about this amazing miracle, and the reliance on that to realize that it is the actions of others that sometimes brings about the real blessings as they were lowering him down. I imagine that when they lower him down and then Jesus' first words are, "Your sins are forgiven," I'm thinking that those friends are like, "No, no, no, no, no, no. We wanted the healing. We weren't looking for sin forgiveness." Jesus doesn't heal the man immediately. He first gives him what he knows that he needs, which is forgiveness. And that's not done purely based off of what this man has done. In fact, the forgiveness given to him is based on the faith that he sees.

Faith is an Action

And what I wonder is: do people see your faith? What brought about this forgiveness of sins wasn't the faith of the individual being lowered. It was the faith of those that were lowering him. And this brings about our first challenge in the text, which is: what is it that we're doing in our own lives of faith that maybe Jesus might be able to actually see? What is it that's happening in our own lives of faith that maybe someone else in our circle can feel and know? Because faith was never meant to be just a decision or a thought. It's always been meant to be an action. And that's what was happening in the scene. And when they out of that faith acted, Jesus' first move, as I said, wasn't a healing, but a forgiveness of sins. But we're right there with those friends, aren't we? I mean, when we think about the blessings in our lives, how often do we just step over the blessing of forgiveness, the blessing of eternal life, the blessing of salvation, the blessing of that relationship that we have with God because of what Jesus has done, and then we just start looking for other blessings in our lives? The thing that we need most, the transformational thing that fundamentally changes your life and the lives of those around you, is the miracle blessing that we often just walk right over and past. Let's admit it. Many of us in our lives of faith, we'd be right there with those friends on the roof hoping for the healing as we lowered our friend down—but forgiveness. And so the challenge to us there as well in this passage is for us in our own lives of faith to hold on to that appreciation and that gratitude for that

fundamental blessing that makes all the other ones worthwhile. We may encounter tragedies in our lives—bless you—and problems in our lives and challenges that make us feel like we don't have an abundance of blessings. But the truth is there's that fundamental blessing of forgiveness that we have which rises above all the other circumstances of life. And we have to be careful in our lives of faith that we don't just look right past that.

Miss Gloria's Sunday School Box

Finally, when we look at this situation with these friends, I mean, what an image of them carrying him up there, lowering him down through this roof which they dig out. I still remember every time I hear the story, I think back to being a little kid in Miss Gloria's Sunday school class over at Westminster, and she had this little diorama thing she made. It was like a—it was a cardboard box and she had cut a hole in the top and she had these little wheels at the top with a—with a twine wrapped around the wheels, and it was connected to a little cardboard platform. And you could go into a room and you turn this little crank and it would lower the—the little figure, little dude on it, down to the bottom of the cardboard box. And—and—and that image—that image of those friends willing to carry their friend, that brings us the next kind of both encouragement and challenge that's in this text, and that's that each one of us needs to know this truth: you did not bring yourself to this moment of your faith. Somebody carried you here. Maybe not physically, but emotionally, spiritually, maybe on their prayers you came to the place where you are now in your faith. Maybe on their faith alone, you are where you are in your faith journey. And maybe not just you personally; maybe it's all the work of those who came before, who prepared the space so that the good faith and work could happen here. As I said earlier, I already cashed in all of Pastor Z's work the minute I got here and all that good interim ministry and mission work that he did. And before you got here, saints of the church prepared this space, built these walls, created that culture that makes it a blessing for you to be here this day. You were carried here and brought before God. And their faith has been transformative in your life. And starting with that acknowledgment is a good action for all of us.

A Community Imperative

But then the next step for each of us to consider is: who are you carrying? Who's being lifted up by your faith, by your prayers, by your actions? I'm guessing there's someone in your life that needs you to pick up their mat. I want you each to pull out your worship handout we've got here. And if you look at the bottom of your handout here, it's a little silhouette of a person and then a line that goes across. I want you to think of someone who needs you to help carry them—someone that you can carry with your prayers, with your caring for them, with your love for them that you express that's going to witness to them and witness to God the faith that you have. Who's someone in your life that needs you to care? Who's someone in your life that needs your particular love, your particular work of faith?

And I want you to write their name on this line. Those of you a little more electronically oriented, maybe you just need to get out your phone and set a daily alarm so that you remember this person. But I want you to think of a name you can put on this line right now. There's little pencils out there. Maybe you got a pen with you. You can find one. And I want you to write down a name of someone who can benefit from your faith, from your love. I know you each have someone. When you get done, you're not going to carry this handout around with you. You just tear it out. Just tear it out. It's going to be messy, but your faith is messy. Let's be honest, people. All right? And then I want you to think of where you're going to put this. Maybe this needs to go home on a mirror in your house. Maybe this needs to get folded up and put inside a wallet or a purse. But I want you to keep this name. And I want you to pray over this name. And I want you to love this person and care for this person because they need you like you have needed others. Because faith is never about one personal decision. One of—one of the ways that we have gotten off at times in our faith is to talk so much about, "Oh, your personal decision, your personal decision of faith." Your salvation is not a personal decision. Your salvation is a community imperative. It is something that is needed by the community. You need the community to come together, which is made up of the individual works of faith and love and devotion that you do for one another and that you go out and do for that community. And this is about being part of a community, because faith is not a "me" thing. Faith is an "us" thing. Put this somewhere precious. And just imagine the gift with all these people here and all of you at home. You don't have one of these, but I think you probably can find a place to write down a name and to think about it often and to pray about them often and to love and care on them often as a witness of your faith as well. Just imagine how many people might be brought before God with all these names that we've written down today. Just imagine what transformation might happen with each of these names written down today. May God be glorified by the witness of your faith in this person's life.

Hallelujah. Amen.