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7TH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
(Proper 2)
February 19, 2006
First English, Austin
Text: Mk.2:1-12

TEARING A HOLE IN THE ROOF

It must have been quite a sight. Must have caused quite a stir amongst those inside the house.
“What the hell is going on?”

They were tearing a hole in the roof! That’s what was going on. Not a normal sort of thing to do to what (one would assume) was a perfectly good roof. But the place was slammed with people. Couldn’t get *close* to the door, much less *inside* it, to where *Jesus* was. And they wanted, needed, to get close to Jesus. Needed to be in his *presence*.

So they tore a hole in the roof. And they lowered this paralyzed guy down through it. Probably slung ropes under the mat he was lying on, then slowly and evenly played out the rope so they didn’t dump the guy off the mat onto the heads of the crowd below. The people below gradually giving way to make room, because this guy was coming down on a mat. Coming in through a hole in the roof. Tough to ignore something like that. Must have been quite a sight.

And Jesus, when he saw their faith—the faith of the people who made the hole and lowered the guy down, and the faith of the paralyzed guy—when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralyzed guy: “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

We’re told how some of the scribes who were present reacted to Jesus’ audacity—taking authority to do something God alone could do. Forgive sins! What’s with this?

But what about the paralyzed guy, lowered down through the hole in the roof, lying there on his mat—I wonder what *he* was thinking. “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

He *may* have thought, “What? Well thanks for that, Jesus. But that’s not exactly what I had in mind. Not the reason my buddies tore a hole in the roof, lowered me down. Take a look, Jesus—I mean, I’m layin’ here paralyzed.” He *may* have thought that. Lying on his mat, in his place, that’s probably what *I* would have been thinking.

Most every Sunday in this place a hole is torn in the roof, figuratively speaking, and we enter into the presence of God, and shortly after having been lowered down through the hole in the roof we hear the words spoken to *us*. “I...declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins....”

That is the place in *this* place where we begin most every Sunday. And though we can certainly walk into this *space* without being lowered through a hole in the roof—please don’t cut a hole in the roof; and though I can think of only one or two occasions when there were so many people in this space that others couldn’t get in—nevertheless, if it’s entering into God’s *presence* that we’re talking about, and it *is*—not just getting into a space (remember the reason for tearing a hole in the roof was to get the paralyzed guy *close* to Jesus, into Jesus’ *presence*)—then it is forgiveness of sins which makes our entering into that presence possible.

Thinking theologically, the forgiveness of sins is the hole in the roof that brings us into the presence of God by restoring our broken relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We are relational creatures. We are created to be in relationship—with God, with one another, with creation. But as we are all too aware those relationships are all too often, all too easily, damaged or broken.

And what damages and breaks them is sin in its many manifestations. Selfishness, undue pride, greed, mean-spiritedness, covetousness, idolatry—you don't need me to make a list for you. This is the stuff of which broken and painful relationships are made, and we've all had our share of experience in being on both the giving and the receiving end of those.

There's only one thing that can heal broken and damaged relationships. Forgiveness. Vengeance, getting even, doesn't do it—that creates still more brokenness. Ignoring the brokenness—pretending it's not there—doesn't get rid of it; just perpetuates it. Complaining to others about it doesn't get rid of it, that just spreads it around to others.

Forgiveness. Life begins again when relationships are restored. When brokenness is vanquished. So *that* is where we begin when we gather in this place. We begin with restoring our broken relationship with God, which opens the door for restoring our broken relationships with others.

Unfortunately, because we hear that word of forgiveness most every Sunday, it has the potential of becoming commonplace, perhaps overly familiar, perhaps even a bit automatic and perfunctory. We should not allow that to happen. That which we do at the beginning deserves our attention.

For it is a roof opening experience. Our broken relationship with God crowds us away from God's presence. But in Christ God tears a hole in the roof and lets us in. And God says, "Daughter/Son, your sins are forgiven." And through the pastor God says, "I...declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins...."

Whatever we bring to this place, we begin with that roof opening experience. And then, in the presence of God through Christ, the broken relationship with God restored—then we can go to work on the other things that ail us and paralyze us, and let Jesus go to work on them too. Our aches and pains, our burdens and our sorrows, our trials and our fears, and more.

St. Albert the Great is the Catholic Church in my neighborhood. Along with other things, the signboard out front gives the times for the "sacrament of reconciliation." That's what the Catholic Church *used* to call "confession."

It's the same sacrament of penance that is celebrated. But the change in name is significant. For be it called the "Sacrament of Reconciliation" in the Catholic Church, or be it called the "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness" in the Lutheran Church, or something else in some other church—it is a "hole in the roof" experience.

It is God, through the community of the church, going out of God's way for you and me, sinners all, to make reconciliation possible. It is God in Christ tearing a hole in the roof and dropping us through whatever God-stuff, or personal stuff, or other people stuff, or any kind of stuff has separated us from God and from one another—and putting us into God's presence and making reconciliation and new life possible.

And when that has happened, then whether we're carrying someone else on a mat, or whether we're the paralyzed one on the mat, or whether we're the one who carries the mat away because we've been healed—whichever it is we know that we are reconciled with God and restored to and supported by one another.

A hole in the roof among friends, and between God and us, is everything. Relationships are restored. And life begins again. AMEN.