

## **At the Movies: 1. How Far Would You Go to Help a Friend?**

**Mark 2:1-12**

**August 1, 2021**

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Today we begin a new message series called, *At the Movies*. This is actually a series that we do every summer because we think it is a reminder that if we are paying attention, we can find God in ordinary, everyday life. Sometimes we're so busy looking for God in the big stuff, we miss God in the little stuff. So beginning today and for the next 2 weeks, we're going to take a look at 3 movies that carry a gospel message. Today's movie is *The Peanut Butter Falcon*.

This is the story of three unlikely friends. Our first character's name is Zak. Zak is a 22-year-old man with Down's Syndrome and a man with a dream. For years, Zak has been obsessively watching old VHS tapes of a professional wrestler named Saltwater Redneck. Zak dreams of becoming a professional wrestler himself and he desperately wants to attend Saltwater's wrestling school. But Zak is stuck living in an assisted living facility as a warden of the state because his family cannot care for him.

Next, we meet the second of the three characters. A young, widowed, compassionate social worker named Eleanor who works at Zak's assisted living facility. She has had to confront Zak again about his tendencies to run away but later that same night he manages to escape by stripping down to his tighty-whities, rubbing baby oil all over his body and slipping out between the bars of a window. Then he takes off running down the road to freedom wearing only his underwear. Eventually, he reaches a boat ramp where he hides out in the bottom of a boat that belongs to a small-time outlaw named Tyler.

Tyler is the final character in this story. Tyler has some pain in his life. His older brother, Mark, was killed in an accident when Tyler fell asleep at the wheel. Since then, this wayward fisherman has fallen on hard times. He is running from his grief and guilt, and now running from rival other fishermen after setting a bunch of their fishing gear on fire. The last person you might expect to be Zak's buddy is this guy named Tyler. But Zak and Tyler develop a beautiful friendship that goes both ways. Tyler finds an unconditional acceptance in Zak and Zak finds someone who believes in him and embraces his dream. On their journey, Tyler must wrestle with the question, "How far will I go to help a friend?"

Tyler finally agrees to get Zak to his destination which is Saltwater Redneck's School of Wrestling. And to make better time, Tyler decides to "borrow" boat; a boat that belongs to this guy named Jasper, a blind man who loves Jesus but isn't afraid to protect his property. When Jasper finds them about to borrow his boat, his first question (while waving a pistol around in the air) are they God fearing. Well, to make a long story short, Jasper ends up baptizing Zak in the swamp and then allows the two of them to use anything from his junk yard to build their own raft. And away they go.

Eleanor eventually catches up with Zak and Tyler and insists on bringing Zak back to the assisted living facility but Tyler and Zak both say no way. Instead, Tyler invites Eleanor to join them on the raft. Well, Eleanor is not on board with any of this so, to keep Eleanor from taking him back Zak throws her keys in the water. Now Eleanor finds herself wrestling with the same question, "How far will I go to help a friend?"

I first saw this movie on a flight to San Diego and I remember thinking at that time that this movie reminded me of a story that is found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This

event must have been so compelling, so life changing when it happened, that all three of these gospel writers tell it with essentially the same details. It is the story about a man who was paralyzed. A man, perhaps like Zak, who was discounted and devalued by many because of his condition. But a man with dreams just like the rest of us. A man who knew what he wanted and that was to be healed so that he could walk.

Right before this second chapter of Mark, we read that Jesus has been out and about, going from temple to temple throughout the region, teaching, preaching, and healing. The word on the street was that he was coming home, home to Capernaum and everyone came out to hear him teach. Everybody was there. Everybody, that is, except the paralytic. This was the chance he had been waiting for. This holy man, this healer was coming to his home town but how was he going to get to Jesus? He couldn't do it on his own, he was paralyzed. The Bible doesn't tell us what was causing his paralysis. Maybe it was a physical ailment or something that occurred at birth. Perhaps he was paralyzed by grief, guilt, loneliness, anger, or fear. We don't know. We just know he couldn't walk so for his dream to be realized, he was going to need the help of his friends, some friends who valued him and believed in his dream.

*Mark 2: 1-12. After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat/stretchers on which the paralyzed man was lying.*

Okay, we need to pause here for just a second. We can't just read that like this is normal behavior. These friends tore a hole in the roof of someone else's house. Who does this? These friends saw that because of the enormous crowd, there was just no room for anyone anywhere. So someone got the idea to climb up on the roof and tear a hole in it and lower their friend to Jesus. Can you just picture Jesus, teaching inside this house, when dirt clumps, dust and dried grass starts to fall from the ceiling. And then, this man on appears on this stretcher right in front of him? These four friends, these stretcher bearers were willing to do anything, including wrecking the roof, to help their friend get to Jesus, no matter the cost or the consequences.

And what did Jesus think about that? Well, Mark tells us, *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!"* Okay, hang on, I must stop again. The first thing out of Jesus' mouth was, "your sins are forgiven?" Now, I'm sure this guy was thinking, "Okay and thank you??.... but that's not actually why I'm here. What I really want is for you to heal me so I can walk." But this is not what he really needs. It is what he wants and what his friends want for him, but it's not what he needs. This is what is so amazing about Jesus, he knows what we need, and he wants to give us exactly that. He wants to have a relationship with us, forgive our sins and provide a community in which we love and care for one another. Sometimes He gives us what we want but his promise is to give us what we need. And what this guy needed most was for his sins to be forgiven. And then, did you notice this? *"When Jesus saw their faith..."* Not just the man's faith but THEIR faith, the combined faith of all his friend. Because of THEIR faith, he healed him. *He said to the man who was paralyzed, "Get up, take your mat, and go home."* And he did! This is an amazing story that began with the question, "How far will I go to help a friend?"

Back to the movie, the day finally arrives, and Zak gets to meet his hero. Much to his dismay, he learns that Saltwater's wrestling school closed over 10 years ago, but Saltwater is a good

guy and he agrees to coach Zak and teach him some of his moves. He begins by asking him what he wants to know, and Zak says, "The Atomic Throw!" (This was Saltwater's signature move back in the day, where you lift your opponent over your head and throw him out of the ring.) But Saltwater confesses to Zak that's impossible. No one has ever done it. It was just a camera trick. After a few hours of coaching, Zak wants to wrestle in a match, so Saltwater gets one of his crusty, old, has-been wrestler friends to agree to wrestle with Zak. And during this match, Zak is getting beat up badly when he is overcome with a super-natural power and throws his opponent out of the ring by completing the Atomic Throw! The movie ends with Tyler, Eleanor and Zak headed to Florida to start a new future together.

So here's what I found these stories have in common. Mark tells us that this guy's friends brought him to Jesus to get what he wanted, and in the process, he also got what he needed. Zak wanted to be a professional wrestler but in the process of realizing that dream, he also got what he really needed, a family.

2020 was an extremely challenging year for everyone because of COVID and I know that many of those challenges continue today. My husband Jerry and I had some extra challenges that had nothing to do with COVID. In June, Jerry was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. This came as a total shock to us because, by all appearances, he is a healthy, strong, 59 year-old-man with no history of Parkinson's in his family. In August, our daughter, son-in-law and two young grandsons were t-boned by another car going 60 miles an hour. In September, my doctor discovered that I had not one, but two hernias that would require surgery and in November, we lost our 10-year-old Golden Retriever to cancer. We felt like we just kept getting punched in the gut and some days, honestly, it was hard to get up. We needed some stretcher bearers in our life. And so our friends, and family and you, Messiah Church, you showed up. You sent us notes of encouragement and beautiful flower arrangements. You called "just to check on us." You brought us dinner. You offered words of advice from your Parkinson's journeys. And you prayed for us. You carried us when we could not carry ourselves. That's what the family of God looks like.

So let me end with this question. Do you have friends like this? Friends who will do anything possible to help you achieve your dreams? Friends who pray for you? Friends who show up even before you ask? Friends who will wreck the roof to get you to Jesus? This is one of the many reasons that we encourage everyone here at Messiah Church to be a part of a faith group. It's vital that we have friends in our lives who will carry us when we cannot carry ourselves, and who will point us to Jesus. But perhaps the most important question for today is, are you that kind of friend? Are there people in this world when asked, "who is the friend in your life who continually points you to Jesus", respond with your name? Are you willing to wreck the roof, no matter the cost or the consequences to share the love of Jesus with a friend? How far will you go to help a friend?

Let's pray: Jesus, we are so grateful for your love and for your grace and for your invitation to be part of your family. We are thankful that you know what we need and desire to give us just that. Use us, the people of Messiah Church that we may be the kind of friends that will do whatever it takes, including wrecking the roof, to point others toward you, our hope and our joy. Amen.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 1, 2021**

**Weekly Prayer:** Loving God, you are the one who calls us into community with each other to love and work, to support and heal. You call us into community with all people, to bring justice,

hope, freedom, and truth. Fill my heart, fill my eyes, fill my ears with Your love, that I might share Your love with others. Amen.

## Monday, August 2

### Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, "Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins." Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed, "Get up, take your mat, and go home." Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

**Observation:** This incident so awed Jesus' followers that the first three gospels all tell the story nearly word for word. The man in the story badly needed healing. By himself, however, he wasn't going to be able to get near Jesus. With effort and ingenuity, his friends brought him into Jesus' presence. Jesus healed him inwardly even before he restored his ability to walk.

**Application:** Have you ever been mentally, emotionally, or physically paralyzed, and had people who cared about you carry you through the situation? Have you ever been part of carrying someone you cared about through a crisis? In either case, what did it take to "dig through the roof" to meet the other person's needs?

**Prayer:** Jesus, I give You thanks for the stretcher-bearers in my life. What would I do without them? Keep me ever aware of others who may need my help, grace and understanding, then give me the courage to respond as you would respond. Amen.

## Tuesday, August 3

### Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, *Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord.* Instead, *If your enemy is hungry, feed*

*him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head. Don't be defeated.*

**Observation:** Today's Scripture twice uses a term that sounds so ordinary we might miss the fact that it's a key New Testament idea: "one another." God did not call Christians to a solo journey through the hostile Roman world. They were a community, strengthened in their power to "overcome evil with good" by their steady, loving commitment to one another.

**Application:** Hurt people hurt people. Sadly, this is true. Jesus came to offer a new way of "being" with one another, which Paul summed up as "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." Think about Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Mohandas Gandhi—and Jesus. They "overcame evil with good." What is your experience of living this way?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, help me to always respond to challenging people in my life in the most loving way possible. May I always remember to take a deep breath, hit the pause button, and ask, "What is the most loving thing I can do in this situation?" Amen.

### **Wednesday, August 4**

#### **Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17**

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

**Observation:** Being a group or church "member" can sometimes feel like "paperwork." My name goes on a list, I agree to certain things, I receive news and notices, stuff like that. But Colossians didn't say we are "members of an organization," but "members of one body." The image suggests that Jesus connects us to each other organically, as a leg or arm is joined to our body.

**Application:** Today's verses are about what it means to be "holy." What kind of person does the word "holy" bring to your mind? How do "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" enrich your sense of what it means for you to be holy? In what way is the close connection of Christians to each other vital for living truly holy lives?

**Prayer:** God, let me see with your eyes, hear with your ears and love with your heart so to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience with every person I meet today. Amen.

### **Thursday, August 5**

#### **Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12**

Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so

that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us.

**Observation:** Someone once wrote, “To live above with saints we love / Ah, that will be glory! / To live below / with saints we know / Well, that’s another story.” Christian community doesn’t just happen by magic. When John wrote, “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” he spoke of a process in which the Holy Spirit grows in us the ability to love rather than hurt.

**Application:** A common view of love is expressed as a feeling, but the Greek word used here for love is *agape*, which John used to describe what God did for us in Jesus. It wasn’t about warm, fuzzy feelings -- it was action oriented. When have you been upheld or comforted by God’s gritty, determined kind of love, either from God directly or through another person?

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for loving me unconditionally. May I return that same unconditional love to all I meet without any expectation of reward or recognition. Knowing I am loved by you is enough. Amen.

### Friday, August 6

#### **Scripture: John 13:31-35**

When Judas was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately. Little children, I’m with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now—‘Where I’m going, you can’t come.’” I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.”

**Observation:** We read yesterday that God’s love is the motive and the power by which we love one another in the Christian faith. God’s love for us was not distant or abstract. It took human form in Jesus. With the Roman cross awaiting him on the next day, right after Judas left into the darkness to betray him, Jesus gave his followers this call to love one another.

**Application:** A non-religious friend you invite to join your faith group says, “I don’t know. So many churches make so many claims. How do I know the folks in your group are on the right track?” What do you say? What does it take to live into Jesus’ answer to that question: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”?

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for the precious gift of your son, Jesus. May I love like he loved and invite others into community so to share that love, doing life together as you have called us to do. Amen.

### Saturday, August 7

#### **Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 26-27; Galatians 5:26-6:2**

Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly

the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted.

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.

Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other. Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.

**Observation:** The apostle Paul reminded his readers in Corinth that their varied gifts were not tools to outdo others in a quest for power or glory. Connected in Christ, they needed to depend on and support one another. To the Galatian Christians, he wrote that part of their God-given mission was to "carry each other's burdens."

**Application:** John Wesley built the Methodist movement by inviting people into a kind of life he called "watching over one another in love." Are there people in your life with whom you have the kind of trust, candor, and mutual support that Galatians 6:1-2 describe? What concrete choices can make this a reality in the relationships you value most?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, so often the world around me says, openly or subtly, "It's every person for themselves." You call me to a very different approach to life. Give me the heart to live out your calling. Amen.