

## We carry Kevan... Sermon on Mark 2 v1ff

Four people come and intrude.  
They interrupt in the middle of Jesus' sermon...  
Everything had been quiet and peaceful until the moment they showed up.  
Strange noises could be heard from above.  
The roof moved; a hole appeared above people's heads and let the sun and the dust in.  
Building material fell on people's heads.  
The roof is ruined and Jesus sermon, too.  
One can literally imagine people's shock and anger about such interruption and destruction.  
That's the one side.

And the other?!

Jesus sees the situation as well, but with a very different perspective.  
He only has eyes for the paralysed man who is let down from the ceiling ever so carefully.  
And then he sees the four standing above, slowly letting down a mattress tied on strong ropes....  
These four do not say one word.  
No excuse.  
No explanation.  
They simply do what needs to be done. And they know very well how to do it.  
They went and got their paralysed friend and took him to the person and the place where they expected healing.

Let us call them the carers.  
Throughout history the carers have been those who are willing to turn their attention to those who cannot move themselves. The carers are those who carry, who care for and look after, who interfere and act not only for their own sake. They do their job – in Jesus' time and today – in a social context that does not appreciate enough what they do. And often shows no interest in helping those who need help or who do the job of helping.

The four come to the house where Jesus is staying.  
The crowds are queuing in the streets because the house is already packed with curious and needy folk. No way of getting through and inside for the four and their motionless burden.  
Nobody lets them through. Nobody steps to the side.  
The public is not interested at all in their situation.

Understandable?  
Don't we think as well, these four with their paralysed companion should wait and queue and behave like all the others?  
And why do the four not do that?  
Honestly?  
Why can't they wait until the meeting is over?

One or two hours more or less in a life that has always been limited – what difference does that make?

For how many years must this man have already been paralysed? Can't he wait another couple of minutes?

Apparently not!

It seems, the four cannot wait and what is more: they do not even want to wait.

Their main interest is at all times – to create publicity and generate discussion. A discussion about the values of society.

And the question occurs:

What importance do the paralysed, the sick, the disabled and non-efficient have in our society? ...in our religion? ...in our churches?... in the politics of our countries?

And how do we value them and the work and commitment of those who care for them and live with them?

That is what they deal with every day. And in this situation they express a provoking attitude.

They have no other choice but to provoke! Otherwise the so-called healthy society would never realise and admit to how much disinterest they demonstrate and how superficial they are.

If one has good legs there is little motivation or need to get to know what it might feel like to be paralysed.

Handicapped people are so used to being turned away, overlooked and neglected. The burdened and disabled and those who care, know the experience of not being seen...

The only way they can think of to bring some changes into the hopeless situation is to choose public demonstration. They turn to the public with a problem and a burden that most of the time is simply ignored...

They can't afford to get paralysed themselves by the rejection they experience from the so-called healthy people, but must act in the face of it.

And here is the point at which I would like to tell you a second story... one which happened just recently and got lots of public attention in the social media.

I came across it on facebook. A friend had shared the story. I saw it and it touched my heart...

The little youtube film is called "We carry Kevan".

It begins with thirty-year-old American Kevan Chandler explaining about his illness.

Kevan has Spinal Muscular Atrophy.

This is an illness you are born with. Muscles of the person affected become weaker and weaker... in some cases in a very short span of time, in some cases only very slowly.

Generally, the muscles most affected are those near the shoulders, hips, thighs and upper back. Muscles used for breathing and swallowing may also be affected. Eventually the person ends up in a wheelchair and worst case, in the final stage without the ability to breath him- or herself.

The film on Kevan begins with a text saying:

“... spinal muscular atrophy patient Kevan Chandler does have a team of friends that are helping him travel Europe on a trip which soon got the name “We Carry Kevan.”

Kevan wanted more for himself than to be bound to his wheelchair and to only go where his disabilities limited him.

He knew he couldn't do it alone.

While one day he and his 4 friends were all together, they came up with an extraordinary solution to give him exactly what he wanted.

To help Kevan be able to backpack around the world, Kevan became the backpack.

Together, they designed a backpack that allowed Kevan to be strapped in with feet and arm holders and even a neck rest to keep Kevan's head up, and started they the “We Carry Kevan” movement.

Each member of the traveling group of friends takes turns carrying 65lb Kevan to each destination, giving him the chance to go to places often inaccessible to wheelchairs.

By traveling to places like Paris to see the Eifel tower, hiking the English countryside, Kevan is fulfilling his dream and also inspiring others to help those who are limited as well.

The three-week journey ranged from cobblestone streets in bustling cities to hikes through the countryside, which entailed hopping fences and cutting through forests — all made possible by the backpack.

At the moment, Kevan is writing a book about his experiences.

"We Carry Kevan" started off as a simple acknowledgement of many places not being wheelchair accessible, and was turned into an innovative and adventurous lifestyle.

A lifestyle where exclusion of any kind is not accepted, a life style full of flexibility and imagination to open all doors and places at all times. The missing ramps no longer impede progress nor do the stony mountain paths hinder, but the friends who can get round the obstacles without building or removing anything by simply carrying their friend, make all possible.

Often ill and disabled people are encouraged or even forced to live lonely lives.

They are excluded and organised away... They are given machines to cope on their own. What kind of coping is that, I ask. What kind of life?

What does this state about our society when we make our plans for the disabled without using the assistance of human beings, of family and friends?

Kevan's famous words at the end of the little youtube film are:

“Friends make the impossible possible.

With their help my dreams could be fulfilled.

And we could go anywhere and do whatever we wanted to do without having to think about accessibility.

The greatest thing of all was that we got onto this adventure as best friends.”

(And even though the whole trip was very demanding to all of them, they got out of it as best friends too!)

“We want to spread the idea that accessibility is not ramps and automatic doors and elevators, but people helping people!

With the help of my friends I am not defined by the wheelchair and its limits.

When my friends help all the world is accessible to me.

We can't do this alone, whether it is a trip or it is life.

We need each other!” says Kevan, the man with the muscular disease...

Back in our Bible story Jesus sees and reacts to the man and his carrying friends.

"When Jesus saw their faith"... we read in verse 5.

In Jesus' eyes this is faith.

What they are doing, how they have been acting – this is faith!

Jesus turns to the paralytic.

He looks at him full of empathy and deep understanding: there lies a paralysed man on a mat, a grown-up person with the eyes of a frightened child.

Jesus looks at him and the first thing he says is: "Son..." – the first word spoken in this story.

A word full of love and care, indicating relationship.

One can easily imagine Jesus saying these words in a way which the disabled person has not experienced often in his limited life.

It overwhelms him.

It penetrates him all through his suffering body. He can physically sense a difference and he immediately feels a remarkable change.

Somebody is talking to him in such a way that he can feel accepted. He is respected. He feels appreciated.

"Son...", Jesus says to the paralysed man. "Your sins are forgiven."

That is unexpected... they had been thinking of all sorts of things but not of these words.

"Stand up, use your own legs. You are able to walk.

Be free from your sins. Be free from the fear. Feel protected and supported and dare to attempt to live a new life.

Let nobody ever paralyse you again, but go home and be open to God's enabling presence in your life. Stand up!"

"...and he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them."

Healing seems to happen in a couple of moments only.

But this is not all.

What happens to the paralysed man is the end of a long process of healing that had started when four people decided to care for him, to carry him and his burden and share their lives with him.

Such healing, healing of body and soul, can often take years.

And in many cases healing can also mean: to learn to accept what cannot be changed.

Healing can mean to learn how to live with illness, limitations and handicaps. Painful processes at times where people over years have to struggle with themselves and their society, and where you must never be left alone!

Kevan Chandler will never be healed of his muscular illness. At present there is no remedy for it. But his whole life has changed by the very different approach he and his friends took towards his disability.

Kevan can now live in the light of happiness and hope because he has these tremendously loving, caring and faithful friends who walk not only at his side, but who walk for him. And then every obstacle can be overcome. No mountain is too high, no path too stony, no hill too steep, no staircase too long...

One friend alone couldn't do it. But the four of them, they can...

As in the Bible story...

The story of this miracle of healing in fact is the story of a relationship... relationships among the four friends and with the paralysed friend, relationships between Jesus and the friends and the paralysed man., and so on...

Where true relationships are lived, where friends are around you and with you, people can become healed and restored.

God's everlasting and forever loving 'Yes' towards us is offered to us in friendships...

They make our life possible, they make it worth living, and they will always help us to see tiny glimpses of hope at the darkest horizon.

In Jesus name.

Amen.