

**7<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B - 2006**  
***“I am doing something new!”***

God won't fit in a box. God is too big. God will surprise us. For instance, God is not so much about preserving what has been as God is about opening us up to what is possible. Our reading from the prophet Isaiah today says it very clearly. *“Things of long ago consider not; see, I am about something new.”* I can imagine St. Mark reading these words as he prepares to write his account of the gospel and say, *“Aha, that's it! Jesus is about something new!”* We have seen this already in the first chapter of his gospel. Evil spirits are no match when confronted with the power of Jesus' love. He casts them out effortlessly. The people are awestruck. Jesus cures Peter's mother-in-law, and people flock to him as a celebrity, but Jesus walks away from it all, for he had not come to be a celebrity. And we are amazed. Jesus cures the leper, and by doing so, the outcast becomes part of the community again. Rather than divide and separate, Jesus is about bringing people together. We are in awe at the possibilities should this kind of thinking were ever to catch fire.

As we begin Chapter 2, Mark introduces a new element in his stories: confrontation. Not everyone was pleased with what Jesus was doing. Oh, the people were. As the news of Jesus spread, they flocked to him as never before, but so did those who were concerned with just who this Jesus might be. The details of the healing of the paralytic are pretty clear. The crowds were so great that the only way the paralytic's friends could get him near Jesus was by lowering him through an opening they made in the roof. It is the faith of these four men that moves Jesus to do something, not the faith of the paralyzed man. I think we can take heart in this little detail because many of the people we pray for each Sunday here at Mass no longer practice

their faith. But if God sees us praying with sincere faith, it can make a difference.

Then Jesus does the unexpected. Rather than go up and touch the man's legs to heal them, Jesus goes up to him and says, "*Child, your sins are forgiven.*" I can't help but imagine the shocked expression on the poor guy's face as he looks up at Jesus and says, "*It's my legs! It's my legs!*"

At this point, Mark suspends the miracle story and introduces the confrontation story between Jesus and the scribes. Jesus had set up perfectly what we might call a "teachable moment." He came to do more than heal people's bodies. He came for the deeper healing of peoples' souls. But there is still more he reveals, and the confrontation brings it out. And before we get too uppity about the scribes, Jesus knew what they were thinking. And he knew they were correct to question him. They knew that only God could forgive sins. For anyone else to claim this divine power would be blasphemy. And here Jesus seems to be taking to himself a prerogative that belongs only to God. And he is. That's the point! As the Son of Man and the Son of God, Jesus breaks down the barrier between God and humankind. God is no longer off on a distant cloud, or mountain, or in a temple. God is with the people, touching them, comforting them, healing them, loving them, forgiving them. Truly, God is doing something new! Who would have thought! But even more than doing things for us, God, in Jesus, wants a relationship with us.

In St. Paul writings, we see Christians relating to God as a loving parent, Abba, Jesus as their brother and the Holy Spirit as God's abiding presence within them. And in our reading today, St. Paul sees Jesus as the "yes" of God. What does that mean? Well, what was the most important and enthusiastic "yes" we ever uttered? Was it on our wedding day; our day

of baptism; my “yes” to priesthood? Whatever it was, it may give us some inkling of how Jesus was the “yes” of God. And his “yes” is his enthusiastic affirmation of us, of humankind, despite our weakness and sinfulness. In Jesus, God’s promises to the people of Israel are being fulfilled as he heals the lepers, the paralyzed, the blind and deaf. Jesus’ “yes” to God breaks the barriers that have separated God from humanity. In Jesus, things will never be the same again. God is too close! This is something new.

As proof of his power to forgive sins, Jesus has the paralyzed man get up and walk. God forgives sins through a human being. Later he would pass that power on to the believing community, the Church, so the priests of the Church could forgive with the power of God that abides in the community of faith. It’s something totally new. And yet, so many want to go back to the old way. *“I’ll go directly to God, thank you. No intermediaries needed for me.”* Is that the way we want it? God broke down barriers so God could touch us ... through us.

This story is the first of five stories that Mark links together. Think of them as a sandwich. This story and the fifth story are the bread. The second and fourth stories are like the butter, lettuce and mayo. The key story is the middle story. It answers the question, *“Where’s the beef?”* Or, what are these stories pointing to? Since we will be in Lent before we get to the beef, let me tell you. It is the story that teaches the danger of putting new wine into old wine skins. Jesus came with a message that was something new, and we have to adapt to his message, his new wine. We can’t stay the way we were, no matter how comfortable it may make us feel. New wine requires new wine skins. We must adapt to the reality that God is in our

midst; that in baptism we were all born to new life in Jesus, that we share in the gift of divine life; and with that new life, comes new possibilities.

Jesus is humanity's "yes" to God. When we say "amen" at the end of a prayer or as we receive Holy Communion it is our "yes" to Jesus. It says, "*Yes, I believe, I trust, I stake my life on it. Yes, I stake my life on you.*" And when we say this "yes" opens us to whole new possibilities.