Healing of the Paralysed Man

Teacher Background

The teacher background for this Organising Idea is in two parts: textual features of recounts and background information on the healing miracle in Mark 2: 1-12 – the Healing of the Paralysed Man.

Textual Features of Recounts

The purpose of a recount is to list and describe past experiences by retelling events in the order in which they happened (chronological order). Recounts are written to retell events with the purpose of either informing or entertaining their audience (or both).

There are basically three types of recount. They are:

- **Personal Recount**: These usually retell an event in which the writer was personally involved.
- **Factual Recount**: Recording an incident, e.g. a science experiment, police report.
- **Imaginative Recount**: Writing an imaginary role and giving details of events, e.g. A day in the life of a pirate; How I invented...

All recounts typically focus on individual participants and events.

The generic structure of a recount is listed below. The recount has a title, which usually summarises the text as well as specific participants (Jesus, paralysed man, crowd).

The basic recount consists of three parts:

- the setting or orientation - background information answering who? when? where? why?
- events are identified and described in chronological order.
- concluding comments express a personal opinion regarding the events described.

Details are selected to help the reader reconstruct the activity or incident (Factual Recount). The ending may describe the outcome of the activity. Descriptive details may also be provided. Recounts often include personal thoughts and reactions.

Mark 2:1-12 Healing of the Paralysed Man

The early chapters of Mark seem to alternate between the wilderness and the city, where Jesus proclaims the reign of God to ever-growing crowds. The crowd in this story is so large that those carrying the paralysed man on a stretcher cannot get through. Houses in first-century Palestine commonly had thatched roofs that would have been easy to disassemble, yet Jesus praises as a sign of faith the perseverance and ingenuity displayed by those who broke through the roof. The complete cure of the paralytic restores him to health in body and spirit and astonishes the crowd. It also serves as an intimation for Christians of the true nature of Jesus and his mission of reconciliation.

Scribes were experts in the written law and its oral presentation and gained their office only after rigorous study and laying on of hands. Because Jewish tradition strictly held that no one could
forgive sins but God alone, Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness was certainly startling to those present and would occasion question and even outrage. It is striking that so early in the Galilean ministry, Jesus answers an accusation of blasphemy; the charge that would be levelled at him when he was later on trial before the Sanhedrin.

While we don’t know what was the cause of the man’s paralysis, all we know is that he was unable to make the journey unaided. It is important in our understanding of the story and indeed the miracle that the cultural context is considered; that is, the way in which the Jews connected illness to sin. To the Jews of Jesus’ time, a sick person was one with whom God was angry. The Rabbis had a saying, There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all of his sins have been forgiven him.

As a result, it is possible that the man on the stretcher may well have had years of cruel treatment and judgement from others and had become overwhelmed by the guilt that had been heaped upon his shoulders by others. He was ill, therefore he was full of sin, therefore God was seriously angry with him as an individual and he could not be healed.

We don’t know what the medical problem with this man was, whether it was a medical or psychological condition that prevented him from walking. That’s not to try and play down the miraculous nature of the event, but to try and understand why Jesus acted as he did, because a closer analysis of the text reveals that it wasn’t healing that Jesus offered initially.

Jesus said to the paralysed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven; not "You are healed, get up and walk." That response tells us something about human nature and also about Jesus. What was the first thing that Jesus saw as he looked into that man’s eyes? It may have been fear! Here was a man who was totally convinced that God had some sort of personal vendetta against him; that he was virtually an outcast due to his condition. What did he feel as Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven?

William Barclay explains it this way. ‘The first thing that Jesus said to him was "Child, God is not angry with you. It’s all right." It was like speaking to a frightened child in the dark. The burden of terror of God and estrangement from God rolled from his heart and that very fact made the cure all but complete. Through the act of healing and forgiveness, Jesus not only showed the love of God. He also shows the paralysed man God’s justice and forgiveness.

And what about the teachers of the Law? Verse six records, 'But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there said to themselves, "What? This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins?" Only God could forgive sin and to claim to be able to do so was blasphemous and punishable with death by stoning. So what does Jesus do when he realises the way that their minds are going? Jesus simply tells the man to get up and walk much to the amazement of all those standing around trying to see what was going on.

The implications for the teachers of the Law were unthinkable. A man who is sick is sick because of sin. He needs forgiveness in order to be healed and cannot be healed until forgiven. This man was plainly healed therefore he must be forgiven and Jesus’ claim to be able to forgive sin must be true. They were powerless to accuse him and could only plot Jesus’ downfall. It was here, so early in his ministry, that Jesus in effect signed his own death warrant.

The other main players in this story are the four friends who brought the man to the house where Jesus was teaching. Although they only figure in two verses of the reading, these four friends have a lot to say to us about overcoming barriers and stopping at nothing to reach a goal. Firstly they had to carry the stretcher for what was possibly some distance to the house. Maybe they’d followed Jesus for a while, because he doesn’t seem to have stayed in one place for very long.
When they got to the house there was another barrier, a crowd of people pouring out of the door and outside onto the street. There was no way that they could get the man anywhere near the door. You can imagine the jostling of the crowd as they try and get a glimpse of Jesus or hear a word or two as he teaches inside. One of them might have squeezed through, maybe two, but not all four *and* a patient on a stretcher. They could have just parked their friend outside and waited until Jesus left the house, but that might have meant a long wait in the hot sun and the uncertainty of a wasted day. But these friends were so determined.

So they broke in through the roof. Presumably they risked the anger of the owner of the house. They risked bringing down the roof on top of Jesus’ head. Certainly there would have been a lot of dust and debris falling down as the digging continued on the roof. What did Jesus think and the crowd inside the house? This must have created quite a disturbance. But this was the one chance that the four had to get their friend down at the feet of Jesus. They risked failure. What if Jesus had been unwilling to help? What if the crowd ganged up on them to stop them damaging the house? Somehow it didn’t seem to matter.