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Macalester Plymouth United  
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**Some Song or Thing**  
(Mark 2:1-12)

**Friends by the Fire**

Time: God gives us lives measured by time that we can either waste or use to do something significant.

I play with Barbie dolls. Well, just when my god daughter Maggie comes over to play. She is five years old and insists on playing immediately when she comes through the door.

Now I know you aren't supposed to give Barbies to children as role models, but I didn't give them to her: they are MY Barbies, all three of them, six if you count the Kens. And it's my Barbie condominium, my Barbie jeep, my Barbie Corvette.

The plot lines we play are conceived by Maggie, (which is why we have a male dog that gave birth to a litter of puppies) and my only role is to play Ken, Ken, and Ken to her Barbie, Barbie, and Barbie.

Two weeks ago the Barbies and the Kens left the condo to go sit around a campfire on the beach. The sun had just gone down and the fire provided both light and warmth to the six friends. Sasha the Arabian horse was nearby, contentedly chewing at the grass that poked through the sand.

Everybody took turns doing some sort of act to entertain the others. Two of the Barbies sang songs that sounded suspiciously like they were borrowed from a certain five year old's Catholic School concert. One of the Kens made everybody laugh by doing imitations of animals. Still another Barbie recited "Rose are red, violets are blue..." something, something, something that I think was vaguely silly.

As the fire died down, one of the Kens stood up and addressed the others. "Barbie, Barbie, Barbie, Ken, and Ken," he said "I'd like to recite a poem as well. This one comes from the Sufi poet Rumi, who wrote:

Bird song heals my longing

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I am just as ecstatic as they are, but with nothing to say.  
Please God, practice some song or some thing through me.”

Saying nothing more, Ken sat down amongst his friends.

“Please, God, play some song or some thing through me.” What a beautiful statement, not just a statement of our need for significance, but of our need for significance to God. THAT’S what I like about playing Barbie.

### **No Extras**

One way to gauge how figures from the Bible matter to God, I suppose, is to look at the roles they play in the plot lines God devised.

First there’s the A list, the giants: Moses, Jacob, Mary, Mary, the other Mary. Then there is the B-list: people who move the narrative: Jacob’s sons, the disciples, people whose lives embodied God’s love for us, including the man healed in today’s reading.

Then there’s the C list: the nameless people who died in the great flood, the crowds cheering Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, the four men who carried the paralyzed man to Jesus. The anonymous ones.

But aren’t these the people we related to the most? The observers? The supporting characters? In the poem Ken recited by the fire, Rumi listens to the birds but has no song of his own. It’s always someone else’s story. Or is it?

Put yourself in the scene of today’s reading: I imagine it was quite hot the day a group of men decided to travel to the house where they heard Jesus was, four of them bearing the fifth. The Bible calls him a paralytic, but to them he was a friend, a friend who was paralyzed and he wanted to be healed. Even with four people sharing the load, what love to carry the body of a friend, to honor the hope of another.

As they approached the house and saw people literally spilling out the doorway, absolutely blocking their chances of entering the house. The decision they made was quite gutsy: they carried their friend up the stairs on the outside of the house and onto the roof. If it was like other Palestinian homes of the time, the roof was thatch and mud laid on top of wood beams and they would have had to literally dig a hole to lower their friend into the house. What determination.

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These men were not extras in a movie, people who are listed as man 1, man 2, man 3, and man 4 in the credits. They were people who in response out of their love for another performed something exceptional. Even Jesus saw that.

In the chapter of the Bible just before this, Jesus heals a leper because his pleas for help fill him with compassion. Here, Mark tells us Jesus was moved by the faith not just of the man on the mat, but of the friends who carried him as demonstrated by the lengths to which they went.

### **The Sacrament of God's Presence**

Last week a bunch of us went out for dinner to a restaurant in North Minneapolis. A dingy place. Either that or it's trendy. Dingy, trendy, sometimes it's a fine line. As we sat at the booth talking, I was feeling a bit low on energy and I kind of checked out of the conversation and into my own little world. I was satisfied to sit there in kind of a daze as the voices of friends wound around me. Then I found myself focusing on our waitress, watching everything she did and how she did it with an almost clinical eye. While the restaurant was dingy (or in fact trendy) she embodied hospitality. She slipped in and out of our conversation silently, interrupting only to ask what we want or need, with such a genuine kindness.

By the time our meals were ordered I was compelled to come out of my shell and announce "Don't we have a great waitress?" They looked at me like I had just told them that I play with Barbie dolls.

But the fact is, she reminded me of a fellow monk that Father Thomas Keating wrote about in one of his books. This was a man who had no business entering a vocation that involved removing oneself from the world. He was an extrovert.. His love for his brother monks, silent as it was, became annoying to the others.

(Just a tip: if someone who is a paragon of patience and of love finds you annoying, there is a good chance you are, in fact, annoying.)

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One day, just after his retirement, Father Keating found himself the object of this monk's hospitality. It came at just the right time for someone who was dealing with the end of his active career. Father Keating thought "This must be what God is like."

"When someone treats you in a way that makes you think of God," wrote Father Keating "that person is clearly a sacrament of God's presence."

When we remind people of God, whether by literally carry a friend through a crisis or simply extending kindness, we experience the answer to our prayer "God, play some song or something through me."

Amen.