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Love, Grow, Share

Luke 5.17-26

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There are three qualities we see repeatedly in stories around Jesus, three virtues we're wise to incorporate in our lives every single day; three behaviors that Jesus encourages in the people around him – **Love, Grow, Share**. You can pick almost any encounter between Jesus and an individual or a group of people in the Gospels and you'll see at least one if not all of three of these qualities is present, needed, or advocated. In the Gospel of Luke, people who've been physically sick, socially outcast, or enslaved by sin – have their lives put back together and made whole by Jesus who confronts all people with the demands of living in and proclaiming the Kingdom of God in which we're called to **Love, Grow, and Share**.

Last week we talked about how there are times in our lives and as a church when we need to “Turn North” and step out in faith. This week's Gospel passage is about four friends who do just that – motivated by love and growing faith they bring a friend in need to Jesus. Friends still play an indispensable role in bringing individuals to Christ. **Luke 5:17-26** (TNIV): “One day Jesus was teaching, & Pharisees & teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee & from Judea & Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. **Some men came** carrying a paralyzed man on a mat & tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof & lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. **When Jesus saw their faith**, he said, **“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”** The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began **thinking to themselves**, *“Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, **“Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up & walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”** So he said to the paralyzed man, **“I tell you, get up, take your mat & go**

home.” Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on & went home praising God. Everyone was amazed & gave praise to God. They were filled with awe & said, *“We have seen remarkable things today.”*

As Jesus’ ministry grew in popularity, he attracted not only people in need, but also the Pharisees and the teachers of the Jewish law who came to scrutinize and often criticize what he was doing. In this story, while they were present so were a lot of needy people. The house is quickly packed. Jammed to the rafters. Spilling into the street. Breaking the fire code. Folks couldn’t get in the door. Jesus is talking & healing in the midst of a standing room only crowd when there’s an interruption. Suddenly, a mat is being lowered with a man on it right in front of Jesus. What’s going on? If you have a friend with a toothache, what do you tell her to do? Get to a dentist. If you have a friend who falls & breaks his arm, you’d call 911 or drive him to the hospital. If you have a friend who is hungry, you’d offer to get her lunch. In any of these situations, we offer to help because we realize that our friend has a need & we know how to help take care of it. We have enough faith in a dentist, doctor, or restaurant that we feel confident about their ability to meet our friend’s need. Do we have as much faith in Jesus as we do in dentists, doctors, & restaurants? These friends did.

Like the friends in the scripture, we all know people who are hurting or paralyzed with guilt, fear, worry, addictive or self-destructive behavior, impatience, anxiety, anger, relationships that have soured, loneliness, depression, grief & all kinds of needs. Virtually everyone here has a friend who is struggling with a sin or an issue of some kind & the need for forgiveness – even if of our friends don’t use those terms. Where do we bring these people? To whom do we bring these people for healing, hope, & forgiveness? The friends in this story say to us, *“Bring them to Jesus.”*

We have friends with needs Jesus can meet but we’re the connecting link. The man in the gospel story is paralyzed – perhaps because of a physical condition, perhaps because of unresolved guilt, but whatever the reason he can’t move which means there’s no way he can get to Jesus unless someone else brings him. His condition represents the condition of so many people. We know people who will never

get in the house where Jesus is present & God's word is shared unless we invite & bring them **which means we have to go to them and meet them where they are.** Unless we do our part, Jesus' power to heal & forgive will never transform our friends. The four men in the gospel not only bring their friend in need to Jesus; they embody a faith that's willing to do **Whatever Is Necessary** to get their friend before Christ. They **love** their friend enough to act, they have a **growing**, trusting faith, and **they are willing to share** their love, faith, time, and energy to help someone else. This is what we're called to as well.

Some of us struggle with knowing when to share with or speak to a friend about Jesus or faith or when to invite someone to worship, a small group, or some other activity. We don't want to offend people or be perceived as pushy. We want to treat other people with respect. The four friends in this story are an inspiration because they take the initiative. Their **love** and concern for their friend is greater than any fear, doubt, or worry they have. They're ordinary people, we never even learn their names, but they have a winning, **growing** faith. They believe so strongly that Jesus can make a difference in their friend's life that nothing will discourage, deter, or dissuade them. The crowd is blocking the path, they can't get in much less get a seat. They don't give up or give in. They immediately begin to think optionally, *"How can we get around this obstacle? How can we get our friend to Jesus"* The people are just too much for them to face, so they climb way up to the top of the stairs & go up on the roof. Once on the roof they begin some unsolicited home improvements – *"this would be a great place for a sky light."* Dirt, dust, & debris fall from the ceiling. There's a commotion. People scatter. Jesus looks up. Where there was only a roof, the sky appears. A mat is being lowered by four men, when it gets down low enough a man can be seen lying on it. Are his eyes the only part of him still capable of movement? Are they looking around with embarrassment at the unwanted attention, wanting to keep being lowered right through the floor out of sight of all these people. And then there are the eyes of Jesus. The gospel tells us what he's looking at.

“When Jesus saw **their faith**, he said, “*Friend, your sins are forgiven.*” When Jesus sees **the friends**, he sees people of love and growing faith. Jesus sees people who have confidence in God. Is it possible our reluctance to bring people to a place where they can encounter Christ comes, at the root, from a lack of confidence that in Christ, God can truly meet people’s needs including healing them? Being healed doesn’t necessarily mean we’ll receive the health of an Olympic athlete or even the health we had when we were younger. Healing may not mean that one who is terminally ill, lives. Healing can take many forms and one of them is the inner transformation that allows us to accept a chronic or even terminal condition, that otherwise would drive us to doubt, despair, or depression. That’s why support groups for people dealing with a variety of challenges are important – whether it is an Alzheimer’s group, a cancer group, a 12 step group, a bereavement group, a Christian small group – they bear witness to the role that **sharing** with friends & a growing faith play in healing and coping.

The friends in the gospel bring their friend to a place of possibility. Without the faith of his friends, this man wouldn’t have been forgiven or healed because he never would have encountered Jesus. Jesus sees **their faith** but he speaks to **the man**. “*Friend, your sins are forgiven.*” This is when the trouble begins. Just as the arrival of the paralyzed man was unforeseen, so is the sudden introduction of sin. Some of the scribes who were sitting there questioned in their hearts, “*Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” It’s dangerous to hang around Jesus. Even if someone doesn’t say a word - a look in the eyes, a stiffening of the back, the trace of a frown – might as well be communicating to Jesus with a microphone. Jesus perceives what the scribes are doing & asks why they think these things in their **hearts**, not their minds. In spiritual teaching, the heart is a deeper space than the mind.

Jesus asks them, “*Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk.’*” Neither is easy to say, is it? Did the man’s spiritual condition cause his physical problem? Was he paralyzed by sin so that only God’s forgiveness could restore him to freedom & wholeness? Was he physically paralyzed & in need of healing so he could walk again? Some Biblical writers make a connection between one’s spiritual

state & one's physical or financial condition, testifying that the holy person is happy & blessed while those who sin contribute to their own physical & financial ruin (see Psalm 1, Malachi 3, & the story of Ananias & Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11). There are other Biblical texts such as Luke 6:20-26 & 13:1-5 & John 9:1-3 where Jesus denies that there's any correlation between the hardships & tragedies people experience & their own spiritual condition. In other words, health & prosperity are not necessarily a sign of or the result of God's blessing. Poverty or physical illness are often not punishment for sin and frequently have their root in other factors.

Whatever the reason for the man's condition he's both forgiven & healed. The healing is evidence of Jesus' power & authority to forgive sins. It is not easy to heal or forgive, but Jesus is willing & has the authority to do both. Sometimes it may be hard for us to determine whether we need healing or forgiveness or both. In one way or another many of us are paralyzed or enslaved in some aspect of our lives by attitudes, habits, & sins from which we are powerless to free ourselves. It doesn't matter how we've come to be a slave to sin or paralyzed by guilt, it doesn't matter what has taken control of our life so that we are powerless to live as God intends. The good news is Jesus forgives, Jesus heals, Jesus frees so we can love, grow, and share with others.

Unlike the scribes, Jesus is not obsessed with rules or control or lines of authority. His obsession is freeing people. Wouldn't you loved to have been in the house to see the formerly paralyzed man exiting the house carrying the mat he had been carried in on – a walking witness to Jesus' power & authority? That must have been amazing! **Three times in this short gospel story a phrase is repeated with some variation. Obviously, it's significant. 'Get up & walk.' "I tell you, get up, take your mat & go home."** Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on & went home praising God." The command to get up or rise up signifies that Jesus sees forgiveness of sins as a form of rising from the dead. Although death usually refers to our physical body, we can lose life in many ways. Relationships die, creativity declines, productivity fades, finances are lost, zest for living disappears;

we're continually in the process of dying and rising. The man is told **to rise up & go home.**

The purpose for being forgiven & healed is to reengage his life. The relationships & work that have atrophied during his paralysis can now be revitalized. He stands, takes up his mat, & walks out obediently in front of everyone in the house. Here is what I wonder about - **Why is he told though to carry his mat?** Is it as a sign of his healing? As an expression of thanks to Jesus? **What he was carried in on he now walks out carrying.** Is it meant to be a reminder? The mat was the sign of his paralysis. Maybe Jesus wants him to take up his mat as the continuing memory of what *was*, so he will continue to live with mercy & gratitude in his heart. He won't harden into self-righteousness because in his home there'll be the mat to remind him of what the love of the Lord did for him.

Or is it possible the Lord wants him to use it to carry others to Jesus, as he was carried? Just as he had been saved by the faith of his friends, now part of his journey is to bring new life to others by bringing them to Jesus. Maybe Christ wants him to find others, put them on the mat that once was his, tell them his story of what Jesus did for him, while he carries them as once was carried. **He is called to love, grow, and share, as we all are. In almost any situation in which we find ourselves, doing one of those three things is almost always appropriate. In the midst of a conflict or a disagreement – Love. What are you to be learning from what you're going through - Grow. Share – anything that is in your power to share so you can be a blessing to others;** never forgetting that if the door is blocked, the roof can always be opened.

Rise up, take your mat, & walk with Jesus.

Benediction: "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal." - Albert Pike

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. One of the truths we see over and over again in the Gospel of Luke is that Jesus can put people's lives back together. How have you experienced or witnessed this in your own life?
2. What is it about Jesus that makes him so appealing that crowds of people seek to get close to him wherever he goes (Luke 5:17, 19)? What do you find appealing about Jesus?
3. How would you compare the desire and effort people make to get to close to Jesus in Luke 5:17-26 with your own? Do you think it is equal or not? How would you support your answer?
4. What role do the friends of the paralyzed man play in this episode? How would you describe their actions?
5. Have you brought anyone to Jesus, or invited someone to a worship service, a small group, or a mission/service opportunity? There is a sense in which the man in Luke 5:17-26 is forgiven, healed and saved by the faith of his friends. What difference is/can your faith make in the life of your friends and family?
6. Who are you actively seeking to bring closer to Christ? In what ways are you embodying the love of God, growing in spiritual maturity, and sharing your time, treasure, talents, and the Good News with others?