

Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, April 18, 2021

**TRAVELS WITH JESUS:
FRIENDSHIP, FAITH, AND FORGIVENESS**

Luke 5:17-26

Last Sunday we saw both the healing power of Jesus and the compassion of Jesus in action in His healing of a man covered with leprosy from head to toe. This healing reveals both the power of Jesus to heal the sick (from any and every disease) and His compassionate heart.

As we continue our travels with Jesus today, we see His healing power demonstrated once again, this time in the healing of a paraplegic. But, as I hope you will see, there is much more to the story than *just* another evidence of Jesus' power to heal – as if that would not be enough all by itself. The truth, as we will see, is that it is *not* enough. Healing the sick is a big, big deal, never ever to be downplayed. But it is not the *only* reason, or the *main* reason, that Jesus came.

Let's look together at this story in Luke 5:17-26. To give the story a title, let's call it "A Hole in the Roof" – because that is what the friends of this paraplegic made in order to get their needy friend to Jesus. Let's give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's Word from Luke 5:17-26.

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This story of the paraplegic's healing and Jesus' jaw-dropping statements about His power to forgive are found in the Gospels of Matthew (9:1-8) and Mark (2:1-12), as well as Luke 5. Three words that all begin with the letter "F" come into focus in these verses: *Friendship*, *Faith*, and *Forgiveness*. We won't get finished with it all today, so we will talk in more depth about the third word – *Forgiveness* – two weeks from today. (Pastor Chris is on deck to preach next Sunday.)

FRIENDSHIP

First, this story is a living example of what *friendship* looks like. Mark's telling of the story includes a couple of details not in Luke's account. For example, Luke doesn't say *where* this event took place. He simply introduces it by saying, in verse 17: "One day as He" – Jesus – "was teaching." Mark tells us it happened in Capernaum (2:1), the town that served as Jesus' home base in the midst of His travels. Jesus was teaching in someone's home. It may have been the home of Simon Peter and Andrew.

The other thing Mark tells us that Luke does not is *how many* men came carrying this paralyzed man in their attempt to get him to Jesus. In verse 18, Luke simply says: "some men." Mark is more specific: He says there were four of them (Mark 2:3).

What you have to love about these four guys was the depth of their loyalty to their friend, their unwillingness to give up when faced with an obstacle, and their willingness to take a risk in order to get Jesus' attention. You know what they did. When they couldn't get in the door because of all the people in the house, in the doorway, and crowded outside the house straining to see Jesus or just to hear Him speak, they decided their only option was to go up to the roof of the house via an outside stairway. The roofs of houses in those days were flat. Most were made of mud thatch. They figured the only way to get to Jesus was through the roof. So they proceeded to cut a hole in the roof. They cut through the dried mud and the tiles holding it in place and lowered their friend, on his stretcher, into the midst of the crowd right in front of Jesus.

Think about this for a moment. As far as we know, they didn't ask anyone for permission to cut a hole in the roof. They just did it. It was a bold thing to do. They could have gotten into a lot of trouble. They could have been arrested for the damage they caused. And who was going to pay to repair the roof? Do you think Jake from State Farm, Flo from Progressive, the GEICO Gecko, or the guy from Farmers' would cover it?

They cared enough about their friend that they were willing to take extreme measures, because they believed Jesus was the only one who could give him the help he needed.

That is a beautiful expression of friendship. Everybody needs a friend, or friends, like that. Everybody needs friends you can count on when the going in life gets hard. This paraplegic was enormously blessed to have four friends who had his best interests at heart, who were willing to go to great lengths and to think outside the box, who took the risk of being criticized or misunderstood – or worse – in order to do for their friend what he couldn't do on his own. They were willing to do anything and everything they could to get him to Jesus.

Everybody needs that kind of friend. You do, and so do I. I hope God has blessed you with a friend like that – or friends, plural – that you can count on through thick and thin. If not, I pray that you will find such friends in the fellowship of our church family, or with other sisters or brothers in Christ whom the Lord has put in your life. Everybody needs that kind of friend. We all do.

And God wants you – and me – to be that kind of friend. God wants each of us, in the circumstances and opportunities and limitations of life as we live it, to be that kind of Christian brother or sister to someone.

Let me ask you: Is there someone in your sphere of influence, in your network of relationships, who needs you to come alongside and be their friend, their sounding board, their encourager, their advocate? Is there someone who needs you to walk with them, or even to carry them, through a difficult time?

The hole in the roof dug by these four men in order to get their friend to Jesus is a powerful symbol of Christian friendship.

FAITH

The second word I want to focus on is *faith*. What Jesus saw when those four guys brought their friend to Him was not just four guys making a mess, or making a scene, by cutting a hole in the roof. What Jesus saw in them was faith. Last Sunday we saw the compassion of Jesus in action. Here we see faith in action – the faith of these four men and their paralyzed friend.

“Seeing their faith” is the way the New Living Translation (NLT) says it (Mark 2:3). The NIV says: “When Jesus saw their faith ...” *The Message* says that Jesus was “impressed by their bold belief.” What caught Jesus’ attention was not the mess they were making. It was their faith. These guys, including their paralyzed friend, believed that Jesus could and would do something to help him, if they could just get to Jesus. They believed Jesus would heal him.

Whenever and wherever Jesus saw faith exhibited in someone’s life, it brought joy and delight to His heart. And He did miraculous things in response to faith.

Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is “the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen.” It is a settled conviction in the heart of what we don’t yet see. Theologian F.F. Bruce said that just as physical eyesight produces evidence or conviction of visible things, so that “Seeing is believing,” *faith* is the organ that enables us to see the invisible order of things. Which is exactly what these men demonstrated when they made the hole in the roof.

In the very first Worship service held in this Sanctuary – 25 years ago next month, on May 12, 1996 – our founding pastor, Dr. Graham Smith, spoke about “The Meaning of Faith.” Some of you were here at that service. You may even remember some of what Dr. Smith said.

He said that faith is not the thing that saves us. We are not saved by our faith. We are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation comes solely and completely from Him. Faith, he said, is the rope that connects or unites us to Christ, who is our only and all-sufficient Savior. Do you see that? It is by means of faith that we take hold of Christ and the salvation that only He can provide.

Dr. Smith went on to describe faith by using the letters F-A-I-T-H as an acronym. Faith, he said, means: FORSAKING ALL I TAKE HIM. It means giving up, rejecting, letting go of all my sins, including the sins I may enjoy, as well as the futile idea that I can ever be good enough to earn God’s favor and make it to heaven. I must forsake all these things and embrace Jesus Christ as the true Son of God, Savior of sinners (including me!), and King of my life. FORSAKING ALL I TAKE HIM.

Second, FAITH means FEELING AFRAID I TRUST HIM. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Psalm 56:3, where David says to the Lord: “When I am afraid, I will trust in You.” David’s life was in danger when he wrote these words. King Saul was trying to kill him, and David had fled to enemy territory. Fear was his companion – just as fear is sometimes our companion.

In the midst of that fear, the kind of fear that can paralyze you, David shifted his focus from his circumstances to the God who was able to protect him and to bring him through all his troubles. God is still able. More than able. FEELING AFRAID I TRUST HIM. Faith can unite you to Jesus so that fear cannot defeat you. “When I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

Third, said Dr. Smith, FAITH means FINDING ANOTHER I TELL HIM. Which is what Andrew did after he met Jesus. He found his brother Simon Peter, brought him to Jesus, and the rest is history. It is what Matthew (aka Levi) the tax collector did after he met Jesus. He threw a dinner party and invited all of his tax-collector friends to come and meet Jesus. It is what the followers of Jesus did after His death and resurrection and ascension into heaven, after the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, as they took the gospel message throughout the entire Roman Empire and beyond. You and I are followers of Jesus today because someone found us and told us about Jesus.

Genuine faith is something we must communicate. It is something we must share, something that people in our world and in our community urgently need. FINDING ANOTHER I TELL HIM.

One of the original members of our church, Joyce Jackson, who now lives in an assisted-living facility in Manassas, once told me of a fourth acronym for FAITH: FORGING AHEAD I THANK HIM.

Jesus calls us to forge ahead in life, doesn't He? He calls us to keep going – to keep going in faith, trusting in His sovereign grace and goodness. Because we know that Jesus is Lord, because we know He is sovereign in and over all the details of life, because we know His word is true and His promises are trustworthy, we can forge ahead in life. And we can do it with thankful hearts. We can give thanks that His mercies are new every morning and His compassion never fails. We can give thanks that His grace is sufficient. We can give thanks that nothing – *absolutely nothing* – in life or death will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

FORSAKING ALL I TAKE HIM.
FEELING AFRAID I TRUST HIM.
FINDING ANOTHER I TELL HIM.
FORGING AHEAD I THANK HIM.

There is one other thing Dr. Smith said that I want to pass on to you. Faith is not like fuel that gets used up as you drive. It is more like a muscle that grows stronger when you use it. It is not something that wears out or decreases in quantity with use. When you put faith into action, it actually increases and grows stronger. Just ask the guys who brought their friend to Jesus what it did for their faith.

Faith pleases God. Do you know what the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6? It does not say that without faith it is difficult to please God. It does not say that without faith it can be challenging to please God. No. What it says is that “Without faith it is *impossible* to please God” (*emphasis added*). Apart from faith you cannot please God. There is no substitute for

faith. Use your faith muscle. Exercise the gift of faith God has given you. Put your faith into action.

The kind of faith that pleases God is the kind demonstrated by these four men who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus – the guys who put their faith into action by making a hole in the roof. They had faith *in Jesus*. They were convinced that Jesus could and would help. And they acted on their faith.

Jesus did not disappoint them. He surprised them, for sure, because He did not do what they expected. He did more.

FORGIVENESS

Which brings us to the third word that begins with “F”: *Forgiveness*. Jesus did not just heal the paraplegic. He *did* heal him. But that is not all Jesus did. Nor is it the main thing Jesus did.

The four men brought their friend to Jesus to be healed. He was paralyzed from the waist down. He couldn’t move his legs. He couldn’t walk. It was obvious to everyone who had eyes to see that what he needed was to be healed. But what was the first thing Jesus said to him? It was not: “Get up and walk; you are healed.” No. What He said first was: “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20). His first word to the man on the stretcher was a message of forgiveness.

This declaration by Jesus sets off a chain reaction of outrage and objection from the religious leaders – devout, law-abiding Pharisees and teachers of the law of Moses – who have come from all over Galilee and Judea and even Jerusalem itself to check out Jesus and His teaching. They know that, ultimately, the only One with the power and authority to forgive sins is God and God alone. If Jesus is claiming this authority for Himself, He must be claiming to be God.

You know what? The religious leaders are right. They get it! They see the connection between forgiving sins and the deity of Jesus. But they reject the claims of Jesus without bothering to investigate whether they might really be true. That is their big mistake.

The efforts of the four men to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus, the presence of faith that Jesus recognized in all five of them, and the healing of the paraplegic are vitally important elements in this story. But the core message of the story is the authority of Jesus to forgive sins. To their eternal loss, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day just couldn’t get their arms around it.

We will talk more about this in two weeks. Last Sunday I said that Jesus is in the compassion business. He is also in the forgiveness business. Like compassion, forgiveness is a way of life for Jesus. It is the reason He came. It is the reason He suffered and died and rose again from the dead.

What Jesus saw when He looked at the man on the stretcher who had just “dropped in” through the hole in the roof was not simply a guy who couldn’t move his legs. What He saw

was *a person* whose greatest need was the forgiveness of his sins, a man who needed healing from the spiritual paralysis of sin in his life.

Which is what Jesus sees when He looks at you and me. Whatever challenges or problems or obstacles you may face, whatever illness or setback you may suffer, Jesus knows that the greatest need in any life – including yours and mine – is to be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with God. Which is why Jesus came.

In your life I hope you have experienced the forgiveness of sins that only Jesus can provide. I hope you know the freedom of being forgiven. If not, please hear me when I say that forgiveness and the freedom it brings – to your soul, to your conscience, to your life – are available in and through Jesus. Let Him set your heart free today.

May you know the blessing of true friendship, the joy of faith, and the freedom of forgiveness in your life. Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.