

June 21

That's What Friends Do



Luke 5:17-26

17 One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.

18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

21 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?”

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?”

23 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?

24 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 and go home.”

25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

Special Music:

One Day - Matisyahu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpQ5Rplc1bE>

The first time that I blew out my left knee was in a production of Three Penny Opera at Texas Woman's University. I played the part of Tiger Brown, a corrupt police chief in London, and the father of Lucy Brown. Threepenny opera is not really considered a musical but more of a hybrid, but it does have several musical numbers and in one of those numbers, I danced. And in that dervish of a dance I stepped up on a chair next to a table, the onto the table, jackknifed and touch my toes in mid air then landed softly on my feet. That is until the second dress rehearsal. Everything was going great. We got into the dance and I whirled my way up on the chair, then up on the table, did my jackknife and touched my toes and not so softly landed on my feet. I heard the pop as my leg gave out from under me and I hit the stage hard. Everything stopped. The music, the dancing, the singing, the acting, it all stopped. Everyone in the theatr heard that pop. I didn't feel like I was hurt. There was no real pain. More of a warm numbness surrounding my knee. And being the trouper that I was, I attempted to stand up and go on and encouraged them to restart the music. Only I couldn't stand up. Every time I tried, my leg gave out under me. I guess if it hadn't been so serious, it might have been funny.

The director of the production was Charles Harrill, who was also a close friend. It's hard not to become close friends with people that you work with intimately onstage. I was taller and much heavier than Charles. But the third time I tried to get up I saw Charles had jumped out of his seat and was running to the stage yelling at me to stay down. Every thespian has this nightmare at some point. It's

much like what a professional athlete goes through when they are seriously injured on the field. The game is over. The career might be finished. Though the pain was minimal, I had to fight back the tears and looked up and saw Charles bending over me. Then something I would not have believed possible, happened. He reached down and he picked me up, literally, and carried me by himself all the way to his car and rushed me to the emergency room and stayed with me while the docs did their best to put me back together. I did the production in an immobilizer and crutches, but dancing was out of the question. The show was a great success. I will never forget what Charles Harrill did for me that night even though he probably doesn't remember. But what Charles did for me, That's What Friend's Do. And the fact that Charles would have done it for anyone in those circumstances made it no less special that he did it for me.

In John 15:13 Jesus plainly says **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”** And just a couple of weeks ago we talked about The Good Samaritan and what it mean to be a neighbor, a friend, a value to people that we don't even know and how we can make a difference in their lives. How can see through their pain to the souls underneath. How can we leave behind our prejudices and our hubris, and then help them when they are so disgusted with themselves that they feel worthless and unworthy of our help. And in that moment, lift them up to our savior and meet their needs through the resources that God provides. Again, I give you the quote from Dr. Robert Schuller: **“The**

secret to success is find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it; find a problem and solve it.”

But just like when we looked at the beaten man in the Good Samaritan story and realized that we often overlook him because we are focused on the Levite and the priest that passed him by. Or when we looked at Tabitha and are struck in awe by the miracle of her resurrection, and completely ignore what she was accomplishing in her community. We look at our story today and focus on the miracle of the paralyzed man regaining his ability to walk and the confrontation of Jesus with the religious leaders about the forgiveness of sins, and we totally ignore the four friends that went out of their way to carry their friend to meet the healer Jesus.

But let’s talk about this friendship for a minute. Most of us are of such an age that we have had the privilege of being a caregiver for someone we love at some point in our lives, being that person that meets needs far beyond that of a normal family relationship or friendship. When someone is solely and completely dependent on us to that point that they have to be fed, clothed, cleaned, lifted and comforted by us. Someone who would not survive if we were not there to meet their everyday needs. God bless the caregivers of this worlds. They are often the forgotten heroes that mean the difference between life and death to disabled individuals.

That's where these friends are. The paralyzed man can't go fishing, can't play games, can't dance around a campfire or join them in normal activities. Most of the bonding that occurs between men happens through shared experiences. And this paralyzed man is unable to engage in those experiences. These men must be very, very special friends to make time to meet the needs of this paralyzed and afflicted man. They have so very much love for their friend that when they hear that Jesus is teaching in the town where they are, they pick up their friend on his matt and carry him to Jesus. They are so full of faith that Jesus can and will heal him that they try to push through the crowd to get to Jesus. And when they realize that that is not possible, they lift their friend up to the roof where cut a hole in the roof to let the man down into the room where Jesus is teaching.

We can draw so many lessons from this story about how much faith these men had, how much confidence they had that Jesus would heal their friend. I can assure you that these men were not worried about whether or not Jesus would forgive the man's sins or if there was a good Sunday School lesson to be heard about forgiveness of sins. They were not concerned that an argument would be raised with the pharisees in attendance. Their only concern was to get their friend to Jesus so that he could be healed of his affliction.

Imagine being in that room and listening to the words of Jesus, knowing that the Pharisees were there and, just as in all great debates, an argument was

inevitable. The crowd was there to hear what Jesus had to say and see what the Pharisees would do and say about it. There was already a great deal of tension in the room and suddenly, straw and dust start to fall on the crowd, and they look up to see a hole appearing in the ceiling above them and the sun shining through. All conversation comes to a halt as the hole grows larger and suddenly a man on a mat is being lowered into the room by ropes. They probably don't even see the men holding the ropes. And now the focus turns completely away from Jesus and the Pharisees to Jesus and what he is going to do about this paralyzed man that is now being lowered down to Him.

The tension has changed from Jesus teaching the crowd, and the Pharisees looking for an opportunity to trip Him up, to what is Jesus going to do about this unanticipated event. Look at the viewpoints creating this tension. The Pharisees have to be thinking, "If Jesus heals this man, how are we going to spin the story to this crowd so that He doesn't look like the hero? If He doesn't heal the man, we can show that He is either unable to heal him or that He doesn't care enough to heal him." The crowd is thinking "We're about to see another miracle." The four friends are thinking, "I hope we made the right decision about all this because we certainly have committed ourselves." The paralyzed man is probably thinking, "Will He or won't He?" and while everyone is waiting for an answer to these seemingly important questions, Jesus says out loud **"Friend, your sins are forgiven."** Now, that must have been somewhat of a disappointment to everyone who could hear His words, because it answered none of their questions and

addressed none of their concerns. It is the last thing that anyone expected to hear.

“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

Why does Jesus do this? Doesn't He understand that the Pharisees are going to jump all over it and create chaos? I mentioned last week how Jesus takes care of the need before asking anything of the person getting the need filled. This story is not in contradiction. He does not ask the paralyzed man to repent. He just forgives His sins outright. His point that He wants everyone to understand, the focus of everything He has done thus far in His ministry, is that the greater healing taking place here is not the repairing of this man's body, but the repairing of his soul. Jesus is very intentional when He does this and is fully aware of what is about to happen.

But I want to point out that the Bible actually gives us a reason for the order of these events. It is the focus of this message. This is one of those verses that can easily be taken out of context and doing so, still teaches a great lesson. But the entire verse says, **“When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”** We are not even thinking about the four guys standing on the roof, and neither is anyone else in the room... except Jesus. **“When Jesus saw their faith.”** Jesus is the only one looking at the four friends. Everyone else is looking

at the spectacle of the paralyzed man being lowered into the room. Where everyone else is in awe of the situation, Jesus is in awe of the intention.

What a wonderful teaching moment. Jesus sees these friends working in the background, serving from the shadows, when everyone else is focused on the obvious. Jesus sees us making a difference in people's lives and rewards us for our service when everyone else is focused on the event and can't even see our participation. I don't want to call it "storing up treasure in heaven" because these men receive an immediate reward... Their friend has his sins forgiven. See there, you thought I was going to say that they saw their friend physically healed, which is also true.

But this story is about cause and effect. **"When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'"** Now, we know that these men didn't go to all this trouble just to have their friend's sins forgiven. They are very much like us. They are very much planted in the real world. They are not given much to heavenly thoughts and they are really not looking for a reward. They do have faith that Jesus can make their friend whole. They must have been sorely disappointed when all Jesus did is forgive their friend's sins. **"We went through all this trouble to get our friend in front of Jesus so that he could be healed and all Jesus does is forgive his sins?"** And then they have to listen to this discussion / debate between Jesus and the Pharisees about whether Jesus has

the authority to forgive sins. All the while their friend is still laying on the mat, paralyzed. That isn't why they went through all this trouble. How frustrating that must have been. If they had known that Jesus was only going to forgive the sins of their friend, they might not have brought him at all.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that we lose sight of what is truly important. That is so easy to do. We allow the spectacle to distract us from the things that are most valuable in our lives. Greater than our physical needs of food, water, shelter and health is our relationship with God. If we strip away everything else around us, we are left with our relationship with God. Good or bad, that relationship will always exist. Roman 8:38 & 39 carry this promise:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. God considers that relationship with us paramount to anything else. It is so important, that He sent His only son to die for us so that we can experience that relationship. So, when Jesus forgives the man's sins, He is stressing that the man's relationship with the Creator of the Universe is far more important than healing him of his paralysis. It does not make the man's paralysis unimportant. It simply places the relationship that the

man has with God above His physical needs. Jesus has every intention of healing the man, but He is going to make sure that everyone in that room, the man, the man's friends on the roof, the pharisees and all the people that are gathered to hear him, all of them will understand that while Jesus may be quite capable of healing the body, His purpose is to forgive sins.

As for the man's friends. They did what friends do. They did what Jesus did. They did what the Good Samaritan did. They did what Tabitha did. They did what my friend Charles did. **"The secret to success is find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it; find a problem and solve it."** They did what friends do because **"That's what friends do."**

We try to limit our friendships. We often think that we can pick our friends. But I want to tell you, as difficult as it is to do sometimes, every human being on this planet is our friend. Jesus went out of His way to make us understand this. Just as every person is our neighbor, every person is our friend. We are expected to pick up our friends and carry them into the presence of Jesus. That is a most difficult thing to do but God gives us the resources to meet those needs. We must not take a passive interest in humanity but an active interest in the lives of everyone we meet, just as Jesus did.

This week, I ask that you pick up a few matts, lift a few souls, bring the people around you into the light of Jesus. Feed them. Clothe them. Visit them. Heal them. Bring them to church. Carry their burdens and make a difference in their lives. Because, “That’s what friends do.”

AMEN

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