

The Messiness of Our Shared Ministry  
Luke 5: 17-26  
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Our New Testament passage for this morning is from the gospel of Luke chapter 5 verses 17-26. Listen for God's Word.

One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.' Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the one who was paralyzed—'I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.'

Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.' This is the word of the Lord...

How often are we like the scribes and the Pharisees? Unable to comprehend or just too sure in our own understanding. Maybe we need to

be more like the friends of the paralytic, who were not afraid to get a little messy? To find an alternate entry when our way is blocked?

I left for seminary thinking that I would get away from the “messiness” of ministry, that I would find the answers.

This passage is strangely appropriate for me. I struggled with trying to find the “right” answers or the right interpretation, and the more I forced it the more it evaded me. So, I read and studied, and discovered the messiness again, but I also found revelation in the midst of it.

The text we are reading today in Luke, is also found in Matthew and Mark. If you are participating in the Summer Book Club, you will have discovered this. I like the descriptiveness of Mark. The passages are almost identical, except for this section here that talks about the friends going up on the roof. In Mark they, “removed the roof above Jesus; after having dug through it.” Here Mark brings us into the messiness as he literally takes the roof off, exposing what is underneath. The Greek word Mark uses when the friends “removed the roof” to get close to

Jesus, literally means to “un-roof,” to separate it from the house, and it is used only this one time in the New Testament. Mark can do that to us, toss a seemingly ordinary word to us that will cause us to stop and pause, to dig and see what he is up to.

We tend to focus on the paralytic, on his friends, on their unyielding desire to get him to Jesus. They scale the roof and then un-scale it as they dig through it, making a mess. Can you imagine what those inside the house would have been thinking as the ceiling was crumbling over them? Bits

and pieces falling in on them. We ask ourselves...How did they get up there?

Did they bring the ropes with them? Did they all go up on the roof? Why didn't it collapse? We almost make the delivery of the paralytic the miracle.

He is lowered down and his sins are forgiven...but wait, this is where Mark gets us again, the paralytic was taken to be healed, there was no expectation of forgiveness because no one could forgive sin but God.

This is the first time, not just in Mark, considered the oldest of the Gospels, but in all of the Gospels, that Christ proclaims that he can forgive sin. This changes everything. These friends, hanging through the opening in the roof, looking down at Christ, these men with their dirty hands and clothing with the light pouring in the house they have just un-roofed, literally expose Christ. Not in the way of the scribes who call him a blasphemer and try to discredit him and dissolve his popularity. Christ uses the faith of these friends to reveal his authority. What confusion and trouble this creates!

I discovered that nowhere in the Jewish scriptures is there a prophet who claims the "authority to forgive sin," and that the Jews did not hold to the belief that even the Messiah would be able to, only God was able to forgive sins. This is totally new territory for all and provides the scribes with the ammunition they will use later against Christ. But through these

faithful friends we have a dramatic image of God breaking in to be with us, in Christ.

Like the people in this story we are often surprised, unsettled or confused by what is revealed in scripture, God never lets us get too comfortable. Each time we read scripture we are exposed to the possibility of this discomfort. How does this “un-roofing” connect with our lives? Are there roofs we need to dig through to expose the revelation of God among us?

We have this wonderful opportunity this summer of immersing ourselves in the surprises and messiness of the Bible and our faith in the Summer Book Club. The best part is that we aren't doing this alone. We have sisters and brothers who dig in this with us, exposing us to more messiness! And our faith is made richer and more fertile for this. Look what these friends accomplished as they struggled together?

Unaware of the magnitude of the part they would play, only desiring to have their companion healed. I pray we do not lose this valuable gift of the faithful community as we try to get it right or cleaned up. What a comfort to know that if I begin to feel paralyzed, I am not alone. Or that if one of my brothers or sisters becomes unable to move, my hand is there.

Last Sunday we baptized Tommy Grossman, and in our liturgy, we promised to “guide and nurture this child by word and deed, love and prayer, encouraging him to know and follow Jesus.” This may seem obvious on this father's day Sunday, but it's a pledge that fathers, mothers,

grandparents, neighbors, the whole church makes. We make this promise for all baptized children, not just those here at First Pres.

Especially during this time of conflict in our world are we willing to be like the friends and get dirty, will we be afraid of the messiness? This father's day and on this day that we celebrate the experience of the children in VBS, remember there are children who are not with their parents today. We are called to remember our promise to nurture and care for all God's children. And I feel we should not only make this promise for the children, we should also promise to support and nurture their parents. The somewhat tired saying of "it takes a village to raise a child" might be changed to "it takes a church to raise a child," the whole church.

It can be hard to figure out how we are supposed to do this – we worry about getting it right. If you don't have children, or taught Sunday school for a million years and feel you have done your part, or you are a parent caught in all the busyness that is our culture today, how do we live this promise out? Because I know we all make this pledge honestly, but the messiness of life hits us.

We need to realize that nurturing the faith of our children can take different forms. Today we celebrate Vacation Bible School, which nurtures and encourages our children. Not just our children here at First Pres, but those outside these walls. It is an evangelism tool and takes many hands to accomplish it. And we do it with the Church of the Holy Spirit, which models connecting with our neighbors. As well, today the children are helping us to see what they have learned, they are teaching us.

We also welcome home our senior high work trip participants who have returned from Roscommon County Michigan. As we support them in this ministry throughout the year, we encourage their moving out into the world to share Christ's love. We are equipping disciples, young and old.

But nurturing and encouraging is not done solely in teaching Sunday school, or VBS, or on Work Trip. It happens when we model for them how Christ calls us to love and care for each other in our daily lives. Taking our children and young people to visit the homebound, by

Reaching out in word or deed to someone who has suffered a loss or is ill. A child will learn how to be a follower of Christ when they see us do it, when we teach them that even when it is messy, we do not do it alone. Teach them to look for the surprises that are God in our midst. Like the people in the house with Jesus, to be open to the discovery that God's plan is always much bigger than ours.

So, invite our children into your lives, ask them to tell you their favorite Bible story, or the one that they struggle with the most, and then share yours. Don't worry about the right answer. The theologian and pastor Karl Barth, gave a lecture at Rockefeller Chapel on the campus of the University of Chicago in 1962. After his lecture, during the Q & A time, a student asked Barth if he could summarize his whole life's work in theology in a sentence. Barth said "Yes, I can. In

the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'" We sang it at Ray Pierobon's funeral last week, with all of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren singing with gusto!

You might attend Playground Church one Sunday or sit in the back of the sanctuary with them during Prayground Church. And yes you can even teach Sunday school. Find ways to connect and live out our promise. Ask Sean or Sarah or me, or Nancy or Chip for suggestions and definitely share yours with us. Don't be afraid of the messiness. When we have a lot going on it can feel messy. This weekend we had the wrap up of VBS, two memorial services with receptions, a tour of the Sanctuary, work trip returning, and worship. Through it all we saw God's presence here with us. We might have to walk through some VBS grass that escaped the vacuum cleaner, but those bits of messiness are evidence that we are living out our call as followers of Christ, and keeping our promise.

Will we be like the paralytic's friends and dig in to the messiness of ministry together, or will we be like the law lovers and not want to get our hands dirty? I believe we are already digging in. The revelation of God in our midst is most visible, most exposed when we dive into the messiness together. Amen.