

Bible Passage (Luke 5:17-19)

On one of those days, as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him [Jesus] to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking 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 midst before Jesus.

Introduction

It's a privilege and honour to be able to share with your congregation this morning. While the means of communication is undoubtedly different than what we expected or hoped for, it's grace that allows us to gather this morning. We truly do have much to be grateful for even now during this pandemic. This includes God's peace. And, this peace-like-a-river does indeed attendeth our souls, and comes from our experiential knowledge and trust in God's goodness, God's glorious reign over all of history, including God's loving rule over all the craziness seen and felt in our world today.

And God's loving care over the details of our lives reminds me of a story from way back in the fall of 2012. Back then, on an afternoon in autumn, I decided to head over to Mount Pleasant cemetery in Toronto to walk, pray and reflect. I know walking in a cemetery may seem weird, but stay with me. As I walked through Mount Pleasant cemetery on that Sunday afternoon, I suddenly had a thought come in my which was this: see if the Canadian Jonathan Goforth is buried here in this cemetery. So, I grabbed my phone and searched the online registry to see if this missionary to China I read about in a biography was in fact buried just off of Yonge Street in Toronto. About 15 minutes later I excitedly stood in front of Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth's gravestone facing the inscription: "They glorified God and loved man".

In that moment, God spoke to me his son Jonathan, in yet another way, about how he was calling me to go forth to China. Then, in January 2013 I was in China where I sought to glorify God by proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of Christ to people with little or no access to the gospel.

Jonathan Go-Forth. For thousands of years God has been calling the people of God to go-forth and make disciples among the deepest shadows and darkest places of

the world. Compelled by the love of God and confidence in God's Word, this is what led this Presbyterian missionary and graduate of Knox College Toronto Jonathan Goforth to China, and then Korea from 1888 to 1935. Convinced that no person or place should ever die without having a chance to respond to the gospel is what led people like St. Columba to dangerous, hostile and pagan Scotland in the 6th century. Convinced that God's glory is meant to cover the whole earth is the reason why my wife and I were invited to share about missions in China with a passionate network of young people at a Presbyterian church in Sao Paulo just a few years ago.

And as we come to this passage in Luke this morning, we come with the humble and sober recognition that generations before us have laboured in Christ name so we can read the Bible in our heart language together on this first Sunday of Advent, and access the treasure above all treasures, which is this: Jesus Christ.

I want to read this Bible story again. Luke 5:17-19. On one of those days, as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him [Jesus] to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking 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 midst before Jesus.

I want you to imagine for a minute that you are sitting here at St. Andrew's on a Sunday morning with lots of people. Then, the minister begins to share stories from God's Word. It's quiet. Everyone is listening carefully. And then things get crazy. The building vibrates and shakes. You look up and then you see this group of guys holding a concrete demolition gun and they are blasting through roof and the ceiling of St. Andrew's Aurora. Yep, you heard me correctly. They are blowing the roof off of the sanctuary while God's people are in the middle of their Sunday morning service. Two minutes pass, which seem like the most awkward two minutes of your life. And then it happens. These guys start using four ropes tied tightly around something that's dangling in mid air. You think you're dreaming. And then you see them start lowering this other man on some flat thing. The guy flying down to the chapel looks sick, broken and messed up. What's going on. The desperate sick man hits the side of the pulpit. Thud. Then you hear the guys shouting and screaming, "hey, we just wanted to get this crippled broken guy in on the worship. We tried but you were all in the way. He needs help. Please lead him to worship. We're out. See you later." Silence [Pause] There's been a holy interruption.

Talk about crazy right. How would you feel if you were one of the people in the crowd watching this unfold? Amazed? Ashamed? Scared? Excited? Worried? Angry? Frustrated? Confused? Here's the question from this story in the Gospel of Luke I want you to think about this morning. The question is this: **what roofs are you willing to break through so the lost can have access to the transforming power of Jesus?**

This question is a question for all disciples of Jesus Christ. It's what Christians ought to wrestle with, and prayer fervently about when God's Word is given functional authority in their lives. God's Word tells us that Jesus alone is the way-truth-and-life (John 14:6), and of the utter lostness of all humanity without the grace of God found in faith in Christ. Seeing the lost have access to the transforming power of Jesus is a something that has challenged me for many years.

When I was about sixteen years old, Christ met me during the end of my eight year battle with mental illness and intense spiritual attacks. After God's grace found me, I wanted others to meet Jesus. I remember a few weeks after being saved, giving a CD of my favourite Christian hip hop artist to a random stranger on a bus because Jesus was worth it, I wanted others to experience His life changing gospel, and because he asked me to. And God kept challenging me, convicting me, and stretching me to grow in seeing people through His eyes. Again, and again God has kept asking me the question: What roofs are you willing to break through so the lost can meet Jesus? This is what has led me to work in ministry to Muslims for the past 12 years in places like dusty deserts of Central Asia, underserved immigrant communities in Toronto, and among international students. And I want to keep growing and becoming an on-fire disciple of Jesus who, motivated by gospel love, will do crazy things for God's glory to be displayed and made known in the lives of the lost.

So, back to the story. How do these "some men" mentioned in Luke chapter 5 help bring us closer to Jesus and model what radical discipleship looks like? Here are five ways they do so:

First, these disciples happily submitted to the leadership and lordship of Jesus Christ. They were not some independent guerrilla warriors who were anti-authority and anti-accountability, ready to destroy and disrupt the community of faith. No, these men were under the authority of God, giving functional authority to God's Word, and ready to do whatever God asked them to do in an effort to

strengthen, grow and add to the people of God. When we submit to Christ and the Word of God we are energized and loaded with the ingredients for healthy discipleship practices, which includes a growing sensitivity to God's Holy Spirit. This is what it ultimately means to be under authority.

Second, these men were outward looking. They were continually and intentionally attentive to God's work and activity in whatever space or place they were hanging out in. They were locked into love and were eager to bring good news to those who were paralyzed in their sin. Why were these 'some men' the only ones who took notice of the paralyzed person? Luke says the crowds around the house where Jesus was were huge and epic. V17 also tells us that it wasn't just that there were lots of people, but Christian pastors and ministry leaders were in the crowd too. Did any of them take notice of the paralyzed man? Luke seems to indicate that they didn't. The truth is most of the crowd had their backs to the needs of the world, because they were too caught up in churchy things. While the crowd was physically close to Jesus and the things of God, they were actually creating a barrier blocking and preventing the paralyzed man from entering the house and meeting Jesus. Sometimes our Christian consumerism not only destroys us and steals our joy, but hinders others from receiving the gospel. But these 'some' men, had been given a new engine, and were rewired with Holy Spirit circuitry to see what's in whatever room God has them in, to see things as he does. These men saw this man and had compassion on him. They knew the paralyzed man had no access, no way to get to the one source of healing and salvation. They refused to allow this man created in the image of God to continue going unnoticed and remain lost behind and outside the crowd of "church" culture. Moved by God they met this man. Love reached out. Love incarnated through the eyes and attentiveness of these men.

Third, these men were relentless, bold and creative in their obedience to God. The Dictionary describes a relentless person as this: someone who is determined to do something and refuses to give up, even if what they are doing is unpleasant. These "some men" had their mind made up – no matter what, we are getting this paralyzed man to Jesus. They took responsibility and owned what God was asking them to do. Getting this man to Jesus wasn't an aspirational goal; it was a convictional one. And these men didn't make excuses, or allow any lie, any obstacle or any criticism to distract them from their mission. They had laser focus despite the social barriers as well as the physical challenges. And there were many obstacles in their way:

Wall number 1. The frustration and disappointment with the people of God. Think how difficult it would have been for these guys to walk up to different parts of the chapel in an effort to get this man into this religious gathering and hear again and again, 'sorry, we're busy right now' or 'let me pray about it first' or 'I'm not sure this is appropriate for the house of God' or 'we need to have a meeting about the theology of paralytic outreach first' or 'don't you know the church leaders are here to make sure things are stable, secure and suitable. Don't rock the boat man' or 'Who do you think you are? You are just trying to get all the attention in front of these church and ministry leaders.' These men had a crowd of problems and reasons to just assume God had closed the door, and they should just give up. But God called them to be relentless in getting this sinner to Jesus.

Wall number 2. How do I get this man into the house with Jesus. Sometimes relentless obedience involves going around the crowd instead of through it. Participating in God's rescue mission doesn't come without a fight. It's not like we can hold up our phones and say "Google, find me the fastest and easiest way to get to Jesus." No, there is no easy way to get lost people to Jesus. Satan always puts traffic in our way. Satan always wants to get us to stop short of full obedience. But the Spirit of God is committed to helping us on whatever mission He calls us to. And He often does this by giving us creative ideas and courage to step out in faith in bold, crazy and risky ways. Imagine you are a member of the group of men. You're standing outside of St. Andrews Aurora, holding this paralyzed man on a mattress, and wondering what on earth you are supposed to do. Any thief trying to break into a house like this would give up and move on to another house. High gate. Lots of people. Lots of community leaders so the government will be around, and ready to act. Ah, no. It's too much work. It's impossible. And at this moment in the story, these men in Luke 5 were probably thinking the same thing. And then the Spirit says to these men in a still small voice, "Go and break the roof off." It's not like getting an adult man up on the roof— who can't walk up remember — is an easy thing to do. It wasn't like these guys could easily press the elevator and then miraculously arrive on the roof of this building with a hole in the roof to let this paralyzed guy down through. No, they needed to find a way to carry this guy up to the roof, and then shatter the tiles, and break their way through to Jesus. They needed to be resourceful and creative in developing and executing a plan to get this desperate man to Jesus. While it might have cost them jail time for destroying property, physical pain as breaking roof tiles was hard work, not to mention the risk of falling, these relentless disciples were committed to ripping the roof off. They knew the truth that Ralph Winter once said, "Risks are not to be evaluated in terms of probability of success, but in terms of the value of the goal." Risk big for God's mission. Rip the roof off so others can meet Jesus. Create and recreate with

the blessing of the Spirit of God, even despite the challenges and obstacles before you in your life.

Fourth, these men were committed to working together as a team. There's a reason Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. There's a reason God calls communities of people to serve together on missions way bigger than themselves. And these men who carried the paralytic and brought him to Jesus show us this. First, they discerned the Spirit of God's work together not in isolation. Second, they coordinated and communicated effectively for the sake of the greater mission. Third, they served not with independence but with interdependence on each other to accomplish the shared mission and goal. If you want to carry someone on a stretcher or mattress up the stairs, there's no room for superhero ministry stunts or distracting competitions and games. There's an urgency. There's a team. There's a togetherness.

Fifth, these men were passionate about God and to borrow a phrase from Patrick Fung, they lived to be forgotten. Question: after these men dropped the paralyzed man before Jesus, do we ever hear from them again? Answer: no: These men bring the paralyzed man to Jesus and get out of the way. As far as we know, we never hear from them again in the whole Bible. These men knew it was all about Jesus. The ripping the roof off was an expression of their obedience to Jesus, but the outcome was firmly in the hands of Jesus. Would this paralytic man walk or not? What would Jesus do? What gift from heaven would show up in that dusty Middle Eastern room on the day the roof was ripped off? Whatever ultimately happened, or didn't happen, these men faithfully followed, worshipped and trusted Jesus. Jesus had the power to heal. Jesus has the power to save. Jesus is worthy to be worshipped. Jesus is Lord. These men were chasing after this truth, because they were passionate about seeing more people meet and worship Jesus.

Conclusion:

When we read the rest of this story in Luke we see that the paralytic man does get healed. His sins are forgiven. He picks up his bed and walks. A few weeks pass. And the totally transformed once paralytic man is walking on the streets. He has been forever changed by Jesus. He is thirsty for more, too. He wants to be a radical disciple of Jesus. But where to start. And then he thinks back to the 'some men' who under the authority of Jesus obeyed, who were outward looking in their love, who followed Jesus with a relentless, brave and innovative commitment, who worked together as a team, and who with a passion for Jesus and His fame quickly got out of the way for Jesus, who is worthy of all blessing, honour, glory and power. **What roofs are you willing to break through so your neighbours in**

your community can have access to the transforming power of Jesus? What roofs are you will to break through so fellow residents at your retirement home can have access to the transforming power of Jesus? What roofs are you willing to break through so your family can have access to the transforming power of Jesus?