

Loving Like Jesus 4 – Connecting Love

Have you ever seen something extraordinary at church– something that makes you go home and say, “Church was really good today.” Hopefully, it was a really moving time of praise, a powerful sermon, an intensely intimate communion when Jesus seems so close. But too often the things that keep us talking about church long after it’s over are the nervous foibles, human flaws, and fashion faux pas- the comedy of errors that takes over when good intentions run headlong into Murphy’s Law. These are the things that make people say, “Church was really good today.”

Church was really good today. Deacon Johnson’s phone rang in the middle of communion prayer. His ringtone was Nicki Minaj’s *Anaconda*. Church was really good today. While the kids were singing a song for the children’s Christmas program, little Tyler Bowman picked his nose and wiped it on Breanna Williams shoulder. Church was really good today. We were having a time of silent prayer when Mrs. Breedlove broke wind in the most audacious manner. She didn’t even crack a smile. Got to laughing so hard and couldn’t stop. Church was really good today. When elder Butler got done with his communion meditation he returned to his seat, only he sat in the wrong row and put his arm around Gladys Foster. Church was really good today.

But what happens when Jesus shows up on Sunday? This morning were going to look at a time in Jesus’ ministry where he was teaching and the extraordinary happened. No, Peter didn’t stick his foot in his mouth again. No, James and John, those two sons of thunder, didn’t call down fire on a tough crowd. But when it was all over, Luke says everyone went home, “*glorifying God and amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’*” Let’s read about this extraordinary day. Luke 5:17-26:

17 On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. 18 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, 19 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. 20 And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? 23

Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." 25 And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. 26 And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

What was so extraordinary that made these people go home and say, "Church was really good today?" Was it the big crowds? People had come from all over. Church always seems better when it's a packed house. Maybe it was just the fact they got to see and hear Jesus. He was the hottest rabbi going. In the last chapter in Luke 4:32 it says the crowds were, "*amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.*" They came to hear Jesus to see fireworks and they got them.

To top it all off, it was a day Luke says in verse 17, "*the power of the Lord was with him to heal.*" How cool is that? And it all happens in rather dramatic fashion as the friends of this paralyzed man cut a hole in the roof to get their buddy in front of Jesus. Now, you don't see that happen every week.

The truth is it was probably all of those things and more that kept people talking long after they got home. The most extraordinary thing though was that a man was connected to Jesus in way that went beyond not only what the crowd was expecting, but what even this paralyzed man or his friends expected.

We want to connect people to Jesus in a way that goes beyond our wildest expectations and theirs. As we continue our series on loving like Jesus, we want to look this morning at a connecting love. Ultimately, it's not about connecting people with the church. It's not about connecting them with people. It's not about connecting them with the truth, with a tradition; it's not about connecting them with a place to serve. It's about connecting them with Jesus. All of those other things will happen when we connect people with Jesus, but if we don't connect them with Jesus, none of those other things will ever matter. So, what does a connecting love look like?

Connecting Love Brings Others to Jesus

The most essential point is this— a connecting love brings others to Jesus. You can hear Jesus. You can be near Jesus. You can even follow Jesus, but a connecting love brings others to Jesus.

There were a lot of people in the crowd that day. Disciples, Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, townsfolk, but it was only one man's friends who brought anyone to Jesus, and it made all the difference for that one man. It not only changed his life— he could walk again; it changed his eternity- he could live forever with his sins forgiven. When you bring one person to Jesus, it can make all the difference for that person.

There are plenty of people who want to see Jesus and hear what he has to say. There's plenty of people who want to be in the crowd when Jesus does something amazing, but there aren't so many who are willing to bring others to Jesus, so that Jesus can do something amazing in their lives. We want to be a church, and we want to be a people that bring others to Jesus. Extraordinary things happen when we do.

Connecting Love Overcomes Barriers

Secondly, a connecting love overcomes barriers. It's one thing to bring people to Jesus when it's comfortable and convenient, but what about when it's not? There are usually good reasons why people are far from Jesus. There are always obstacles to bringing them to their Creator and Savior. Do we love Jesus and do we love them enough to overcome those barriers?

Thankfully, this paralyzed man had some friends who loved him enough to overcome significant barriers to bring him to Jesus. The first barrier they faced was the man himself. He had wounds that made it hard for him to come. He was paralyzed and couldn't walk. He was confined to a mat. There was no way he could get to Jesus on his own. They had to carry him.

The truth is that almost anyone you want to bring to Jesus has some wounds that make it hard to bring them, and only some of those wounds are physical. No doubt Jesus can heal, and I believe he still does when it suits his greater purpose, but Jesus was never in the healing business. This is why it says in our text in vs. 17, "*The power of the Lord was with him to heal.*" Jesus wasn't always about healing. He never walked into a hospital and healed everyone there. When he was at the pool of Bethesda, a pool reputed to have supernatural healing powers, a pool surrounded by hundreds of sick and infirm people, and Jesus healed only one. This is because Jesus' miracles were a sign pointing to who he was. His healings served a greater purpose.

Both then and now, the deepest wounds that keep us from Jesus are in here. It is the sickness we carry in our hearts and in our souls. We call them many things— failures,

mistakes, broken dreams, wild oats, fear, depression, guilt. We have wounds and bear scars and the thought of Jesus poking around where it hurts keeps a lot of people away, but if we want to experience his healing love, we have to let Jesus touch us where it hurts. This is why the first wound Jesus heals is the one in his heart. He forgives his sin.

If we want to overcome these wounds, we have love people beyond their hurt, and be willing to do what it takes to bring them to Jesus, even if we have to carry them. For these friends, it literally meant carrying him. For us, we might have to carry people in other ways. Maybe we watch a single mom's kids for free, so she can go to Bible study. Maybe we connect them with one of our Stephen's ministers so they have someone they can talk to about their wound. Maybe it's just an extra measure of patience and understanding we extend as we love them. We need to do whatever we can to carry their wounds so they can come to Jesus.

Another barrier was a physical barrier– the roof. They had to dig through some ceiling tiles to get him to Jesus. They get an award to the most ingenious response to a sermon invitation ever.

Our buildings and grounds guys would prefer if you use one of our four strategically placed doors, but, hey, if you have to cut through sheet metal to get someone to Jesus, then by all means bring your cutting tools to church. We can laugh, but sometimes it's just as simple as going the extra mile to overcome a simple physical barrier or two in order to bring someone to Jesus. Offer to pick them up and give them a ride to church. Make a little change in your schedule so you can meet with them at Grillos and study the Bible. Take an extra five minutes and pray with someone. Be willing to endure music that's not your favorite so others have the opportunity to connect with Jesus? Are you willing to serve in the nursery, so that mom can sit in the service without distraction, and hear about Jesus? Don't let a physical barrier keep someone from Jesus.

There was a third barrier, and that was the crowd. Jesus is at the peak of his popularity at this point. He's gone viral. Everyone wants to check him out and see this rabbi they've heard so much about. They've come from all over. It says from every village of Galilee and Judea. Luke could have used a bit of hyperbole here, but, friends, that's opposite ends of the country. The place was packed.

These people weren't trying to be barriers. They weren't being mean or malicious. They had no intention of keeping people from Jesus. They just wanted to be near Jesus themselves, but in so doing they blocked the way to Jesus. How often is the church like this? How often in trying to be near Jesus, do we actually keep people from Jesus?

We have to ask the question. Are we more like the crowd, or are we more like the man's friends. They were so desperate to get him to Jesus that they wouldn't let anything get in their way. How desperate are we to get people to Jesus? What lengths are you willing to go to in order to bring someone to Jesus? Extraordinary things happen when we overcome barriers to connect people to Jesus.

Connecting Love Knows only Jesus can Fix Us

Thirdly, a connecting love knows that only Jesus can fix us. This man had extraordinary friends that wanted to help him, but there was nothing they could do to fix him. Thankfully, though, they knew who did.

Here's the deal. You have people in your life you'd like to help, but there's nothing you can really do to fix them, but you know who can. When it comes to connecting people to Jesus, we need to remember who it is that fixes people. It's not us. Nothing truly extraordinary happens without a true connection with Jesus. Too often, the church has been in the business of trying to fix people, so that they can come to Jesus. That's not how it works. We don't fix them so they can come to Jesus. We connect them to Jesus, so He can fix them.

We have a new ministry here at Son-Rise called Stephen ministry. We have several men and women who've gone through fifty hours of training to come alongside you to listen and encourage during life's toughest times. One of the things Stephen ministers are taught is that they can't fix people's problems. They are CARE givers, but only Jesus is the CURE giver. Kenneth Haugk writes, "Christians are responsible for care; God is responsible for cure."ⁱ We love; Jesus heals.

Years ago, there was a couple in their 30s that started coming to my church. They had been together a few months. They lived together. She was divorced and came out of a bad relationship. He was never married, and spent his life playing bass guitar for a heavy metal band in clubs and bars throughout the area. He was covered head to toe in tattoos that fit the heavy metal image. Let's just say many of his tats were not appropriate for Sunday.

After about three weeks, a concerned lady in the church approached me after morning worship. “Do you know about that couple?”

“You mean Lorne and Kris?”

“Yeah. What are you going to do about it?”

“About what?”

She leans in and whispers, “You know they are living together.”

“I’m not going to do anything about it.”

She draws back in shocked horror. “What do you mean?”

“They’re not even Christian. It’s not our job to fix them. It’s our job to love them and tell them about Jesus. It’s His job to fix them. Let’s do our job, and let Him do His.”

Two months later, I had the honor to do their wedding and their baptism. I got to marry them to Jesus and to each other. That was awesome.

Throughout this series, you will hear lots of emphasis on loving people in action. It doesn’t matter how much we tell people about Jesus, if we don’t first love them like Jesus. However we can never forget it’s not enough to do good things for people if we don’t ultimately connect them to Jesus. Only Jesus fix us. People can be well fed, have a roof over their head, and have all their physical needs met, but if they don’t know Jesus, they are still lost. George Macdonald writes,

"The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace."

We can’t always fix people, but we know who can. Jesus can do the most extraordinary things in people’s lives. We can help, but only Jesus can fix them. We talk a lot about loving people where they are at, loving them in action, helping the hurting, and meeting people’s needs. However, we must always keep in mind that while there is much we can do to help others, and Jesus works through us, we ultimately aren’t the ones who can fix people. Jesus does that. That’s why we connect them to Jesus.

Connecting Love Knows Jesus’ Forgiveness Solves Our Deepest Problem

Finally, a connecting love knows Jesus’ forgiveness solves our deepest problem. This paralyzed man’s friends brought him to Jesus for one reason, so that he would be healed. That was his obvious problem. But he had a deeper problem— sin. The most

extraordinary thing that happens in this entire story is that this man walks away with his sins forgiven.

Sin is at the root of all our problems. Our mistakes, failures, and foolish choices. Sin feeds that. The conflict, hostility, and bitterness we experience with others. It's fed by sin. The hurt that others have inflicted on us, and the abuse and victimization that has shaped so much of our lives is all driven by sin.

Simply put, the Bible's word for sin means to miss the mark. In this case, the mark is God's perfect character. God is righteous and just in all that he says and does. This is what the Bible calls his holiness, and whenever we don't measure up to the holy nature of God, that is sin. This is why Romans 3:23 says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" This is ultimately what disconnects us from God. Only by connecting someone to Jesus can this sin problem be overcome.

You can't take pill. There's no therapist that can counsel you through it. There's no self-help book that charts a course through your sin problem. You can't undo it by your own hard work and determination. You can't be good enough, or do enough good things to erase it. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Jesus is the only one who can take away your sin. He erases all your guilt. He heals all your wounds. All the king's horses and all the king's men can't put Humpty Dumpty back together again, but Jesus can mend the broken pieces of your heart and your soul and put back together again. That's what Jesus did for you on cross. He paid the price for your sin, so that he could tell you the same thing, he told this man, "*Your sins are forgiven you.*" You just have to come to him.

The crowd probably didn't even realize the most amazing thing they witnessed wasn't that this man was able to rise and walk and carry the mat home that had carried him so many years. It was that he went home a forgiven man. An extraordinary thing happens whenever we can connect people to the hope and healing of Jesus and they find the forgiveness of sins.

It's not unusual that people come to Jesus for one problem, only to discover that he heals them at a much deeper level. A lady comes to Jesus because her marriage is in trouble and she hopes He might help her rekindle something with someone she used to love. A young man comes to Jesus in the throes of addiction. He hopes Jesus will help him throw off the shackles of something that now has him in complete control. A

businessman comes to Jesus to tame a terrible temper that has driven clients and family away. A teenage girl comes to Jesus hoping to fill a hole left by a father who never loved her like a daddy should. Jesus loves each of them where they hurt, but each one also discovers that their issue is not the root problem. Jesus loves them at the deepest level of being. He slowly peels back the layers to where He can connect with them in their heart of hearts. He's the solution to questions we don't even know enough to ask yet. That's where Jesus heals us.

I don't know why you're here this morning. People come to church for all sorts of reasons. Maybe you're here because your parents made you. Maybe you came so your wife won't fuss at you. Maybe you came to set a good example for your children. I'd like to think you're here because you love God with all your heart, and you love his people and there's no place you'd rather be.

But maybe you're here because you've got a problem and you're hoping you can find the answer. Maybe a church or God will help you. Maybe you're just looking for the strength to get through another week. Maybe you're here because you're searching for something, and you don't even know what, but you know you need something.

Regardless of what circumstances in your life and brought you through those doors this morning, there is the real reason why you're here. There's your reason why you're here, and there is God's reason why you're here. Jesus wants to connect with you at the deepest level of your heart. My invitation to you this morning is let God peel back the layers and let Jesus connect with you where He really wants to connect with you.

ⁱ Haugk, Kenneth "Christian Caregiving: A Way of Life"