

March 10, 2019

Sermon Series: “One Day”

“Friends Don’t Let Friends Sit Alone”

Luke 5:17-26

For the last 6 weeks we have been exploring what the Bible says about time: God’s perspective on and relationship to time; His willingness to exercise patience and GO SLOW so that, over time, many more come to know and grow in His love and grace; His desire to see us encounter Him in big and little moments of worship and rest; and His consistent provision of the manna/daily bread we need to live as His present-tense people. God desires to transform how we live each 24-hour day. Last week we joined the Psalmist in praying, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12) We also looked at what Paul said, which was essentially the same thing: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16)

We’re all at slightly different places in our *Pray For Me* campaign, but this is what I prayed on Tuesday morning for Logan Teske and our Compassion child in Ecuador, Adrian. “Father, it is so easy for days and years to pass by before we realize they are gone. I pray that Logan and Adrian would learn, even at their young age, the importance of a single day. Teach them to savor the moments of every day as special gifts from You . . . Give them a long-term view of life so they can make wise short-term decisions.” (p.18) That’s not a bad prayer for any of us.

But only Jesus lived each moment, hour, and day to the absolute fullest. So this Lenten season we’re going to journey with Jesus One Day at a time. Actually, we’re going to look at how He lived several of His days, according to the Gospel of Luke. There are quite a few passages that start out “One Day.” One of these specific “days” mentioned begins at Luke 5:17.

Before we get to Jesus – and what He did on this “One Day” – I want to think about a few others in the story, and what their day might have looked like.

Let’s start with the paralyzed man. How do you think he felt at the beginning of this particular day? We don’t know his full story. But we know he couldn’t walk. I’m guessing he woke up on this day feeling **helpless and hopeless**, just like every other day. He was stuck with no apparent solutions. Ever been there?

And then there are the man’s friends. Mark’s Gospel account tells us there were four of them. Each probably had a corner or his mat/bed. How had their day started? When had they first known Jesus was in town? Surely they had heard Jesus had the power to heal; maybe even seen Him heal someone already. Did they talk about bringing their friend to Jesus the night before?

Or did one of them wake up in the morning with enough faith to rally the troops and put the idea in motion? Their faithfulness and persistence in bringing their friend to Jesus is evidence they were both **helpful and hopeful** for their **helpless and hopeless** friend.

So a couple of questions before we look at one more group of people on this One Day. If you needed help, who would you ask? Who would notice if you were struggling? Is there something less visible that has you paralyzed, or at least stuck? Are you hiding something from others that is keeping them from carrying you? If so, how is that strategy working for you?

Also, who might need you to carry them to Jesus for healing and help and forgiveness? Have you noticed that someone in your life is struggling and stuck? Are you tempted to “fix” them yourself? How might you best entrust them to Jesus? This season of Lent is the perfect time to become more prayerful and attentive to the needs of those around us. **[Disciplines of Engagement]** Friends don’t let friends sit alone, or struggle alone.

There’s one more group mentioned in the story: “Pharisees and teachers of the Law . . . They had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.” (Luke 5:17) What we know in general about this group of people is that they didn’t feel helpless at all. They were in power. They were the respected leaders who had all the answers and made sure everyone followed all the rules. They hadn’t so much come to get help from Jesus, but to scrutinize Him. N.T. Wright likens them to a lobbying group with an agenda. They aren’t there to listen to or learn from Jesus. They aren’t there to be healed or help anyone else get healed; which means that, essentially, they are just in the way, taking up space, and making it hard for others to get close to Jesus.

This question might be the most difficult to hear: Are you and I just taking up space? Are we mostly just scrutinizing what Jesus and His followers are saying and doing? Are we somehow keeping others from getting closer to Jesus? Maybe this Lenten season, we need to repent of being more like the religious leaders than this man’s friends.

So on this “One [particular] Day” Jesus is teaching, full of power to heal in a house packed with critics. And in the middle of His really good sermon – with all the scholars taking notes in order to find ways to dock Him a few points – there is an interruption much worse than a cell phone going off in someone’s purse, or a persistent cough. The men who are hopeful and helpful for their friend are doing everything they can to get him to Jesus. They are literally digging through the roof. They create a hole big enough to lower their friend on his mat, AND create a headache for the home owner – who will now need to call his insurance agent to see if this is covered on his policy.

And then we read, “When [Jesus] saw THEIR faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.’ ” (Luke 5:20) Do you have any idea what a difference YOUR faith can make in the life of another person? I know we value individualism in our culture. I know there is such a thing as enabling, which isn’t helpful at all. And I know none of us want to go barging into someone’s struggling, private life and drag it all out in the open for everyone to see. We’re probably most comfortable praying for someone else; bringing them before God with our requests for healing. That’s a great place to start.

But are there more ways to carry others? And are there safe ways to let others know we need to be carried? **[Talked at length about small groups and people needing to build trust over time in order to get to the place where we can truly carry one another and make known the ways we are paralyzed and stuck.]**

And now we get to the really big stuff in the story. The stuff Jesus said and did that lost Him some points in the eyes of the religious lobbyists. The minute He declares the man’s sins are forgiven, they start muttering under their breath. Jesus knows immediately what they are thinking and saying to each other under their breath. So He asks, “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’” (Luke 5:23) This is clearly a rhetorical question. Of course, it’s easier to tell someone their sins are forgiven. You can’t see or prove forgiveness has taken place in the same way you can see (measure) when someone starts walking for the first time in a long time. Most of us have said we’ve forgiven someone without really doing it, so it’s clearly easy to pretend.

So in a way that only Jesus could clarify He says, “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.” (Luke 5:24) And the man got up immediately and walked home. Now there’s a conversation stopper. Let’s just say even the religious leaders stopped muttering. Luke records that “Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today.’ ” (Luke 5:26)

Strange is an understatement. The Greek word is *Paradoxa*, which might be better translated “Extraordinary” or “Unexplainable.” It’s not just that Jesus is doing great things or weird things. He’s doing things that don’t fit into anyone’s expectations. Strange and wonderful things can happen when people have the audacity to get their friends close to Jesus – who can both heal and forgive sins.

Wouldn’t it be great to see more strange things around here? Things we don’t expect? People carrying those who are stuck and can’t move so they can get closer to Jesus? People actually

letting others know they are struggling and can't make it on their own? But that will only happen if we truly believe that friends don't let friends sit, stand, live, struggle alone.

If you don't let me see your sickness or your struggle, it will be almost impossible for me to know that you need me (and others) to carry you to Jesus. This Lenten season, let's not hide our sickness or our sin. Let's bring both our sickness and our sin to the One who can take care of both . . . Who will ONE DAY get rid of both the sickness and the sin . . . leaving nobody helpless or hopeless.