

Luke 5:17-26

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 April 2013

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] . Aberdeen made the national news a couple of weeks ago with the news of St. John's Episcopal Church just off Crown Street making its premises available for Muslims from the neighboring mosque who had outgrown their premises to gather for prayer in the hall and indeed in the main church building there at St. John's. I'm sure you all saw that news item. I think it first came out about a month ago but then I suppose because it had a kind of Easter theme it was resurrected over Easter and it appeared again and so I certainly saw it on two or three occasions. I'm sure most of you will also know what I'm talking about. Now what do you think about that when you saw the item in the news when you read it in the newspaper? What did you make of it? What opinion do you have of that arrangement? I've been showing some interest just following one or two internet forum discussions on this matter and it's interesting to see how people respond to it. And I'm speaking of those who would certainly profess to be Christians and the response that there seems to be is one that how we ought to respond is a no-brainer but curiously from two very different directions. So you have the response that those who respond in this way are considered to be almost self-evident that this is of course the right thing to do. That what the good folks there at St. John's have done in being neighborly in providing a space for their Muslim neighbors to gather to pray, of course it's the right thing to do. They're

Christians after all. Is that not what we are called as Christians to be? To be loving and kind and neighborly and to give of ourselves for others. And so some respond celebrating what has been done and seeing it as something to be celebrated and indeed to be copied I would imagine in similar circumstances.

It's a no-brainer for some. But then of course there are others for whom it's also a no-brainer but in the completely opposite direction. And they would see it as a blasphemous sacrilege having Muslims praying in a Christian church. I saw one particular opinion being given that it was the equivalent of inviting the local Satanist coven into the church to do their stuff. I don't even know if Satanists gather in covens or what they gather in, but what they do when they do gather. I'm glad to say I have no knowledge and less interest really in what they do. But that was being suggested. What do you think?

Well, what do you think? I veer towards the latter position even though I've painted it in rather grotesque terms or rather dramatic terms. But I do confess to being a little torn.

We do of course have to be neighborly. We are indeed called to love everybody. And we certainly must be concerned for and care for our Muslim neighbors if we have Muslim neighbors and indeed whatever their religious persuasion or none at all. And if we do take a view that is critical of what the good folks at St. John's have done that can come across and might appear to some, indeed to many, as rather small-minded.

[3 : 4 8] Now, why would we criticize this act of neighborly love on the part of this church? But this is a matter that goes beyond the biblical demands concerning hospitality and neighborliness.

And the problem really is a theological one. Do we believe that all religions are different paths to God? That we're all climbing up the same mountain even if the route that we take is a different one. We'll all meet at the summit. Is that what we believe? That's certainly the impression given by the arrangement at St. John's. I'm not in a position to judge what the folks there believe. I don't know. But certainly the arrangement would give that impression. But do we believe and would we claim, or is it the case that when Muslims pray to Allah, they are doing the same thing as when we pray to God, as we have done this evening? Reverend, and I'm afraid I don't know how to pronounce it, but the vicar, or I'm not sure what his title is, it's an Episcopal church, but Reverend Pabalán, who is from India originally, I believe, he's been quoted as saying, and I trust that the quote that I have is an accurate one, but this is what he has been quoted as saying in the press, praying is never

wrong. My job is to encourage people to pray. And for that reason and others, in fairness, he explains why he considers this to be a good thing to do. But I would ask the question, is it possible to pray to God, the living and true God? Is it possible to pray to God other than in the name and resting on the merits of Jesus?

Is it possible to pray in any other way? What does the Bible say about vain repetitions? And of course, we can be guilty of vain repetitions. Let's be very clear on that. Is what our Muslim neighbors do when they gather? Is it praying to the living and true God? Was Jesus right to claim as He did, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And if He was right to make that astonishing claim, does that not have an impact on what we believe concerning prayer?

[6 : 21] Prayer is the implication of that, the necessary implication of that, that we can only come to the Father through Jesus across the board and particularly in the matter of prayer. Surely in prayer that is what we are seeking to do, to come to the Father. And is Jesus not making it very clear that the only way that the only way that that can be done is through Him. If Jesus was right, and if Jesus is right to make this claim, and we believe resolutely that He was and is, then that does have implications.

And one would be that it is at best unwise. We could use stronger language, but we limit ourselves to say it is at best unwise to open the doors of a Christian church for use by what we have to describe as a false religion, a religion that denies that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. And again, let's be frank, is blindly leading untold multitudes to a lost eternity. That is what we believe. It may not be, I don't know, it may not be, it doesn't appear to be, what the good folks in leadership at St. John's Episcopal believe, but that is what we believe. And that is what I would contend the Bible clearly states. Are we then opposed to opening the doors of Bon Accord to our Muslim neighbors? By no means.

But let's open our doors that we might show them something of the love of Jesus and share with them the good news of the gospel. And it is important, it is practically important to be clear on the exclusive claims and demands of Jesus Christ. Next week, as we've been announcing, we start another course of Christianity Explored. Now, if we believe that Jesus is just one of many different ways to know God, then why bother? What's the point? If at the end of the day it doesn't really matter because we all find our way to God one way or another. Why share the good news of the gospel if ultimately it's just one of many ways? But if we believe that Jesus is the only one who can answer life's big questions, that only Jesus can open the way for sinners to be welcomed into the family of God, that only Jesus can forgive sins and save us from an empty life and a lost eternity, then how could we fail to use every means available to make that message known to a lost world? How could we fail to do all in our power to bring people to Jesus? Well, this evening I want to talk about this matter of bringing people to Jesus. And we do so in that context of our conviction that He is who He claims to be, that His claim to be the only way to God is indeed a valid one and one that holds true today. And with that conviction in mind, let's talk about this matter, this responsibility, this privilege that we have of bringing people to this Jesus. And we'll do so drawing lessons from the friends who brought a friend to Jesus. And I refer to the friends of the paralytic, the passage that we've read in Luke 5, from verse 17. We've touched on this passage previously, but on a previous occasion we did so in the context of what it teaches us concerning who Jesus is, and the very important theological truth that we find in this passage concerning the person of Jesus.

This evening we're not going to look at it from that perspective, but rather we're going to focus on the friends who bring their own friend to Jesus and see what lessons we can learn. And I would hope that the lessons that we can learn are applicable in a multiplicity of ways, but maybe particularly we would draw them out in the context of Christianity Explored and the course that begins next week and the opportunities we have by that means. Not the only means, but anyway, but one means whereby we can draw people to hear about and indeed to meet with Jesus.

Let's turn then to our passage in Luke chapter 5. Let's just read again verse 18. And with reading that verse we refresh our memories a little of how this incident begins and then take it from there. We read there in verse 18, some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. What can we say about these friends? And as we notice what can be said about them, let's look how we might draw lessons for ourselves. I think the first thing that I would say about these friends is this, that they understood the seriousness of their own friend's condition. We're told there that the man was a paralytic. If their friend had been in good

health or if he had been a little poorly, as sometimes we can be a little poorly, if that was all the problem or the extent of the problem, we can be sure that the friends would have seen no need to do what they did. They wouldn't have said, well, we've got to take our friend to Jesus. No, it wouldn't have been necessary. The condition wouldn't have been sufficiently serious for them to go to this effort to bring their friend and lay him before Jesus. But his condition was a serious one. And very importantly, the friend could not by himself come to Jesus even if he had wished to. We're not told if he did or not wish to. We're not told if he was involved in any way other than in a passive way of being taken by his friends. But even had he wanted to go, he couldn't have done so without the aid and the help of his friends. And they bring him to Jesus because they are conscious of, they understand how serious his condition is. And the application for us is, I think, a very obvious one, that we don't need to dwell on in any great way or spend any great time on. We need to grasp the serious condition of all those who are outside of Christ. We need to be reminded of what a serious thing it is to be an unforgiven sinner.

[13:25] We need to remember and to appreciate the solemn eternal consequences of being a stranger to grace. We need to be increasingly persuaded, perhaps we are in great measure persuaded already, but we need to be increasingly persuaded that such folk, those folk who surround us and whom God places in our path, are those who need urgent help.

They may not appreciate that they need help. They may not think that they need any help at all. Indeed, those who maybe do recognize that they need help, they maybe don't know where to find it, they don't know exactly what to do, but they have some sense of need, of spiritual need.

But alone and by themselves, they're unable to find the one who is able to help them. And that is why God places His own people in the paths of such folk.

That is why we have the opportunity to enjoy friendship and to have friends whom we can help in this way, just as these friends, understanding the seriousness of their own friends' condition, brought Him and laid Him before Jesus.

That's the first thing we can say. They understood the seriousness of their friends' condition. But the next thing that we can say is that they were persuaded as to who it was who could help their friend. Again, this is a very obvious matter. Who do they bring their friend to?

[14:53] Well, they bring Him to Jesus. Now, we don't know all the history. We don't know what had happened before. We don't know if these friends had perhaps on previous occasions sought to help their friend.

Maybe they had sought the help of other healers or taken Him to others who seemingly might have been able to help. Well, we don't know. But if they did, they had always been disappointed.

But what certainly is the case, and certainly everything we suggest is the case, that now they are persuaded that Jesus and Jesus alone is the one who can help their friend.

And so they bring Him to Jesus and lay Him before Jesus. They're persuaded that Jesus can help. And we must also share that conviction. Indeed, we should have a much greater and deeper conviction, because our knowledge of who Jesus is is far greater than the knowledge that these friends of the paralytic had.

In the light of all that we know, in the light of what the Scripture clearly teaches, our conviction regarding the fact that Jesus and Jesus alone can answer the spiritual needs of all men and women, of every sinner, and we are all sinners, our conviction should be so much greater.

[16:09] We could say so much concerning what the Bible says in this regard, but if we just remind ourselves of the words of Peter, addressed to the Sanhedrin that are recorded for us in Acts 4.12, Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

You can't get clearer than that. Jesus and Jesus alone is able to help. Only Jesus could help this paralytic, and only Jesus can help us and all those who surround us.

So they were persuaded, these friends, as to who could help their friend. But another thing we can notice about them as we get into the details, or some of the details of the account, is that these friends worked as a team in bringing their friend to Jesus.

We're told that some men came carrying a paralytic. And we could imagine that certainly there would need to have been four of them to carry perhaps each corner of the hammock or whatever it was that he was being carried in.

Perhaps others involved as well, we don't know. But the point is that together they brought their friend to Jesus. I don't know if one or two were required to pacify the owner of the house as his roof

was ripped up for the paralytic to be lured down in front of Jesus.

[17:41] But together, they get together, they organize themselves, they agree that they're going to do this, they set aside the time, and together they bring this man, their friend, who they love, who they care for, who they want to see healed, they bring him to Jesus.

It's good for us to work together as a team. It's not good that we should work in the matter of bringing others to Jesus as lone rangers. It can be a difficult matter.

We can be hesitant. We can be discouraged. And if we're alone, it's more difficult and can be more discouraging. So let's seek to work together in this matter.

This week, we meet as neighborhood fellowships. And maybe that would be an opportunity for you to think about, well, who might there be who we could invite to Christianity Explored?

Now, it's not that all of you will invite that person, but even if one person says, well, I think I'll invite this person at work or this friend or this neighbor that I have, even just sharing that intention, or maybe say, well, I already have done, and I'm hoping that they'll respond favorably, and you can pray for one another and work together in this matter.

[18:50] Now, I'm focusing because of the proximity of the event on Christianity Explored, but of course, there are so many other ways in which we can bring people to Jesus.

What I would say to you is, if you're thinking about, well, yeah, it's a week Thursday, and maybe I've just left things a bit too late. It's amazing how we find ways to think, well, maybe not this time. Maybe it's just a little bit too late. It's far from being too late. But there's plenty time still to put ourselves to this matter.

They worked as a team, these friends. But also, as we continue thinking about these friends, we can say this, that they were undeterred by obstacles or setbacks. You could imagine that even before they began, they could have imagined a series of ifs and buts.

They could have thought, well, is it really worth our while? There seems to be so many people following Jesus and looking for Jesus, and this isn't going to work. We probably won't even get the opportunity to see Him.

[19:52] And is it really worth it? Yes, it would be good if we could, but this is not going to happen. Even before they'd begun, they could have persuaded themselves not to begin.

That's something we often do. I know I'm conscious of doing it. I imagine some of you can relate to this. We imagine problems even before we begin. If we are thinking about this matter of speaking to somebody about Jesus, sharing the gospel, inviting somebody to a church service or to the course or whatever it is, and we're thinking, well, I don't really think that person would be interested.

They don't really seem interested. It's really probably not worth it. Or I imagine they'll be too busy. I can't imagine they'd be able to participate. They've got so many things going on, so many responsibilities.

They're always traveling. Well, there's not much point. Or sometimes you think, well, I just have to wait for the right moment. Just the right moment. The moment will appear.

The opportunity will present itself. And it hasn't yet. So I'll just have to wait. We wait and we wait and we wait. And the moment never comes. I think we should, at the very least, respect people enough to give them the chance to say no.

[21:08] If people say no, well, that's their prerogative. But at least let's give them the opportunity to say no, rather than decide for them that they wouldn't be interested. These friends, they weren't deterred by the possible or actual obstacles.

And of course, it wasn't just possible obstacles. In their case, there were actual obstacles. Once they embark on this journey of bringing their friend to Jesus, they are faced with obstacles that might have appeared insurmountable.

And they could easily have turned back. When they arrived at the home where Jesus was, and they saw the crowds, and they saw how difficult it would be, it would have not been unreasonable, really, for them to say, well, we've given it a good shot.

You know, we really did try. It was our genuine intention to bring our friend to Jesus, but it's not possible. You know, what can we do? We simply need to accept the reality and turn back, somewhat crestfallen, but having given it our best shot.

But of course, that's not what they do. They persevere. They insist. They go the extra mile to ensure that their friend is seen by Jesus, is laid before Jesus.

[22 : 21] And again, the lessons for us, I think, don't need to be dwelt upon. Maybe there will be obstacles in our way that might appear insurmountable, and we would quickly give up.

We maybe pop round to see somebody, and it turns out there's folk round, and it's just a little bit awkward, a little bit difficult to broach the subject. Maybe we're imagining that at work, we'll bump into that person we were thinking about, and we just don't seem to be bumping into them. Their paths are not crossing with our paths. Or when we do see them, they're with somebody else, or they're involved in some other conversation, and it's just a little bit difficult. Well, I would encourage you to persevere.

Don't give up too easily. Then, of course, what will often happen is that an invitation will be declined. Maybe very politely, maybe less politely, I don't know, but the invitation is declined.

I wonder, is that evidence, as it were, that it really was a waste of time? It wasn't worth inviting because they're not interested. Oh, by no means. No means is a declined invitation a waste of time.

[23 : 26] By no means. Perhaps most importantly, the Lord is pleased with us as we would seek to make Him known. And even if at this juncture, the one that we seek to approach or invite shows little or no interest, the Lord is pleased with us.

And that is a good thing, to please our God. But, of course, not only that, it may well be that a declined invitation is a link in a chain of the Lord's making. We don't know what people are thinking behind that.

No, thank you. We don't know how in the future, somebody else, maybe it won't be us, somebody else that we never know of and we never are aware of, approaches that same person.

And there in the back of their mind, there is that previous opportunity when there was an invitation that they turned down and then subsequently they wondered, well, maybe I should have just thought about that.

But the time passed. We don't know. We don't know. But we do know that God works in ways that we often cannot see. So these were friends who were not put off by the obstacles.

[24 : 35] But another thing I want to say about these friends, and the way this comes to the heart of the matter, and with this we really draw things to a close, we can say this of these friends, is that their faith moved Jesus. Notice then in verse 20 what we're told.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said, Friend, your sins are forgiven. It's a very interesting affirmation. When Jesus saw their faith, what is quite common in the Gospels is for reference to be made to the faith of the one who is in need, the one who stands in need of healing, and references made to the faith of that individual and how it is used in God's purposes to grant to the one in need the healing that they require.

But here it's different. There's no mention made of the faith or otherwise of the paralytic. We don't know if he had faith or not. What we do know is that the friends had faith. And it is the friends' faith that is highlighted.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said, Friend, your sins are forgiven. That's a really remarkable thing. Not only is it a remarkable thing, but it's also a very challenging and sobering reality.

Because I ask myself, when I ask you, what does Jesus see as you share your faith with others, as you share the Gospel message with others, as you invite others to come and to hear about and discover who Jesus is?

[26 : 04] What does Jesus see? What does He see as you fail to do these things? What does He see? Does He see your faith? Does your faith move Jesus in the way that the faith of these men move Jesus?

The healing of the man, both His physical and spiritual healing, is in the account directly connected to the faith of these friends. It is, of course, Jesus who does the healing of that.

There is no doubt. It is His power that is at work. But it is the faith of the friends that is very explicitly and deliberately highlighted in the account.

Their faith moved at Jesus. What of us? But then the final thing we can notice, and we come and we really jump to the end of the account. And we jump to the end of the account as it relates how these friends, these friends who had brought their own friend to Jesus, how they join with their friend in praising God.

We read in verse 5, once the man has had both his sins forgiven and his paralysis healed, we read immediately, he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on, and went home praising God.

[27 : 21] And if the account ended there, we might wonder, well, what about the friends? Did they praise God as well? We could reasonably presume that they would have done as well. But then what does it go on to say?

Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, we have seen remarkable things today. And in that everyone, of course, there has to be included the friends who had brought this man to Jesus.

As the one healed, praised God, so they too praised God. They joined together in praising God for what Jesus had done. Now, is that not a very attractive and exciting prospect for us, that we, that you might join in the praise of God with those that you have been privileged to bring to Jesus? Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Do you believe that? And if you do believe that, then I trust the implications of that are clear to us all. Let us pray.

[28 : 35] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the clarity of your word. We pray that you would forgive us when we take that which is so clear, the plain truths of Scripture, and we twist them and accommodate them to our own convenience.

Forgive us for doing that and deliver us from doing that. We pray particularly in this matter that you are so clear on concerning your son Jesus.

We thank you for Jesus himself and the manner in which he declares with such clarity clarity and so succinctly and so powerfully that it is in him and only through him that we can come to you.

Indeed, as we pray this evening, our prayer would be of no value. It would achieve nothing if we were to pray in any other name.

For we can pray only in the name of Jesus. We can come to you only in his name, resting only in his merits. There is none other in whom we can come. And we pray that our convictions on these matters would be clear and unshakable, that you would deliver us from arrogance or pride in knowing these things to be true, for there is no reason to be arrogant or proud or harsh in our declaring these truths, but we do pray that we would be clear on them and that we would be conscious of the solemn implications concerning the urgent need to make known the good news of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ to all.

[30 : 11] Help us then, we pray. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close our service this evening by singing again and we'll sing Psalm 67.

And sing Psalms as Psalm 67 and we'll sing the whole of the psalm. It's on page 84. We'll sing this psalm to the tune Hyphrodon. God, be merciful and bless us.

Shine upon us with your face that the earth may know your actions and all lands your saving grace. We'll sing the whole of Psalm 67 and we'll stand to sing. Amen. God, be merciful and bless us and bless us shine upon us with your face that the earth may know your actions and all lands your saving grace.

O God, may the peoples praise you may all people sing your praise for you may they sing may they sing with joy and gladness may they all rejoice O God, may the peoples praise you may they sing as they all unite in song then the land will yield its harvest

God will pour his gifts abroad God our God will surely bless us O the earth will fear our God now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always Amen Lord God