



Sunday, April 11, 2021

**Congregational Prayer:** Al Westerman (live & video)

**Sermon:** Lloyd Eyre (live & video)

### Congregational Prayer

Good morning and thanks for joining us. My name is Al Westerman and I'm the youth pastor here at Living Hope church. It's my great privilege to lead you in the congregational prayer today. And today of all days is a day we need prayer. We are now in the third lockdown and I don't think anyone's all that happy about it for a myriad of reasons. It causes great distress and because of that, we need to unite ourselves in prayer. We need to unite ourselves around what's important.

And so, let's come before the throne today with great expectations. Let's come anticipating the joy that we are going to receive. Okay.

Father God, we want to ask you for that. God, we want to ask you for that joy. God, we want to ask you for the peace in the storm.

We know that you are the giver of every good and perfect gift. And God we praise you, that you are a gracious heavenly Father, that You give good gifts. You give good gifts to those who you love. So, Lord, we ask in anticipation. We ask with expectation, knowing that you will give even more than we ask for. God, we ask for joy. God we ask for peace in the storm. God, we have so many things to celebrate as I talk to people who are running the Church in the City and Disciple a City and The Bridge and all these organizations, Lord. I hear story after story and testimony after testimony of people coming to you. People being baptized and people coming into new life. Of addictions being broken. Of chains being removed, Lord. It is such an exciting time to be alive. God, give us a vision on how we can partner with you in this time. How we can see even more baptisms and people set free. And God, we don't want to avoid the fact that this is a difficult time to live, to have relationships, to communicate with anyone.

God, we thank you that you have made a strong. By ourselves we are weak but we are strong when we are united with you. Thank you for this unity that you're given us, Lord. God, I pray that you create within us a hunger and thirst for you. One that isn't satisfied until we've spent that time and we've been in that place with you. Create this hunger within us. We ask for your blessing on the rest of this service. Let the words speak to our hearts. We pray this in Your name. Amen.

## Sermon

Good morning everyone. It's great to be at Living Hope even though I wish you were all here. It would be great to reconnect. It's now five years since I've retired from the Peterborough Free Methodist Church and the relationship between Living Hope and Peterborough FMC has been longstanding and very rich and very rewarding. And so, good to be with you this morning. I'm speaking from Luke:5:17-26.

17 One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup> Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup> When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." <sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? <sup>24</sup> But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." <sup>25</sup> Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. <sup>26</sup> Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, in this time when we reflect on this very significant moment in your earthly ministry, speak into our hearts today a word of encouragement that we may face the challenges of the days in which we live with courage. We ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Mike has circulated, and I think you will have received already, the outline of the message, which I have provided for you. And if you'd like to follow along with that outline, you're more than welcome to do that and you'll have a sense of where I'm going in this message.

Everyone likes a great mystery. No, that's not exactly correct. Everyone likes to solve a great mystery. When I was growing up, Perry Mason, starring the late Raymond Burr, was the remarkable defense lawyer who solved the crimes that no one else could. And then it was Detective Columbo, played by the late Peter Falk. It was his famous line, "Just one more thing." That was the signal that he was on to something. And then it was Andy Griffith, the Atlanta based lawyer who loved hot dogs like I do, too. In his early career, he was the sheriff in Mayberry. Then as the character Matlock, he became the great go to lawyer for the falsely accused. But one of the reasons why these shows and so many others are popular is because they involve a mystery. And everyone likes to see the mystery solved. So I am pleased to tell you that after 21 centuries, I have solved a mystery. For 21 centuries, the Christian community has read, studied and taught the scripture that tells the story of the paralytic who was taken to Jesus by his four friends. We have always wondered who those four friends were. Why didn't Luke or Matthew in the parallel passage (in chapter nine verses one to eight) and Mark, (in chapter two, verses one to 12), tell us their names? They must have known them because this became one of the defining miracles in Jesus' ministry. Who were these four friends? So I'm pleased to tell you today that I figured it out. But before I do tell you, we need to hear what happened that day.

It was such an incredible day that when it was over the people said, we have seen remarkable things today. So here's what happened. Luke 5:17 tells us that, "One day he was teaching.." inside a house. Now, we're not told the geographic location where Jesus was, but we are told that religious leaders came to hear him from every village in Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. Luke 5:18 And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Enter these four men. We assume there were four men because they were carrying the fifth man on a mat. The man on the mat was a paralytic. Now, the mat equals stretcher. Think about a structure, some of those newsreels that we see from World War I and World War II, would be a comparable comparison. The crowd was absolutely enormous. There was no way to get to Jesus. So these four friends go up on the roof, remove the tiles and lower the man on the mat right in front of Jesus. Luke 5:20 tells us that when Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Well that immediately raises a very significant question.

What did that have to do with his being a paralytic? The religious leaders were aghast. Blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone? Now, they didn't say anything out loud. But Jesus knew what they were thinking inside. So in Luke 5:23, he says to them, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Well, the answer is obvious. "Your sins are forgiven" is easier to say because that's an internal experience. It's much harder to say, "Get up and walk," because something's got to happen if you tell someone to get up and walk. Otherwise, if nothing happens, Jesus is a fraud. So he says, just so that you'll know I have the authority both to forgive this man's sins and by implication your sins too, as well as the power to heal his body, he said to the paralyzed man, Luke 5:24, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately. Immediately, Luke 5:25 writes, "Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God." He got up, took his mat, and went home praising God because he was both a forgiven man and a walking man. And then this marvelous concluding Luke 5:26, "Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Dr. Woodrow Croll, in his comments on this passage of scripture writes, "By causing this man to walk, Jesus proved he could forgive sins." That's what blessed the ordinary folk and what bothered the religious leaders. The common folk said, God is among us. The religious leaders say, there's no way this person named Jesus could be God. He doesn't fit our criteria. Therefore, this isn't God at work. This is blasphemy. You know, it's amazing how nothing's really changed over 21 centuries. People look at the very same evidence. One group says, Jesus is God. The other, no way. He doesn't fit our definition. The question then comes - what about these four friends? What did they believe to be true about Jesus? Obviously, they believe that He was God, that He had the power to heal their paralyzed friend. So, this historical account faithfully and accurately recorded by three historians of the first century - Luke, Matthew and Mark - reveals primarily the divinity of Jesus. And that's why it becomes a watershed miracle in the ministry of Jesus. Because of the revelation of who Jesus actually is.

But it also reveals something about these four friends. Without them, the paralyzed man would never have gotten to Jesus for his sins to be forgiven or to walk again. So, the mystery is about to be revealed. But, just one more thing. Every one of us has a name. We have a first or a Christian name. We have a second name. Some of us have a third and some have a fourth name. And of course we have a surname, a family name. But do you know that each one of us has what I'd like to call this morning, a character name. This is a name that describes who we are, how we are defined. No, I'm sorry to disappoint you, I haven't unearthed any dead sea scrolls that identify the first names of these four friends or their family names either. But I have

felt the Lord has given to me four character names for these four friends. You will see what I mean as I give you each name.

Friend #1 - His character name is Compassion. Compassion. To feel, to feel for another. To enter another person's life. To allow myself to see another person's need as though it were my own. As I have aged, I have realized the increasing significance and influence of my parents on me. I think you will find that to be true too. If you're young at this point in your life, as you age, you will find that parents have more significance as you get older. My mom had a remarkable ability to be compassionate. Part of that was the fact that she was a nurse and we are so grateful during this pandemic to our frontline workers and those of you who are in nursing and medicine health care. Thank you so much for what you're doing for us. Mom was a remarkable nurse. That was really how she defined herself. And compassion was the character name that flowed out of her nursing career. My dad's famous sentence about my mom - and it was absolutely true - was that, "Your mother can see the good in everyone." That was a beautiful, beautiful testimony to who my mother, Alice Eyre was. Several times in scripture, we are told that Jesus was moved with compassion. It got him right in his heart. He could feel for another, he could see everything that they were experiencing. He was able to internalize and understand. Of course, he could do better than anyone else because he was the son of God. It was Jesus' compassion, His love for us that sent him to the earth to die on the cross for our redemption. And of course, just a week after Easter, we celebrate on the Sunday after Easter not only his death but his glorious resurrection as well. It was Jesus' compassion that motivated him to move towards us. Have you been moved with compassion? If so, what are you doing about it? You have to do something because compassion demands action. Which takes me to..

Friend #2. His name is Perseverance. Perseverance. To carry on. These four men who carried the stretcher were met with an immediate obstacle. When they got to the house where Jesus was, they couldn't get near Jesus because of the crowd. And so they said, "I guess we can't do it, it's not meant to be. Let's go home." No! They did not say that! They said, "No, we will find our way." Perseverance is the ability to see the reality of the situation, to be completely aware of what's going on but say, "It will not deter me from doing what I know should be done! We will get through this!" My wife Karen's niece has a plaque on the wall of her home that says these words, "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain." Perseverance. Friend #2.

Friend #3. Friend number three is the creative person. And I've defined this as, creativity is to see beyond the present situation. I love creative people. You know why I love creative people? Because I'm not a creative person. I am not a creative person in any way shape or form. I love to be around people who create the box. I will implement what they create but don't ask me to do the creative stage. Again, we need each other. So, this creative type person, the third of the four friends, says, "Well, we can't go in the front door. Let's go through the roof." This person didn't fixate on the problem. He was very aware of the problem. But he literally looked up for the solution. And that's exactly what happened. They went up on the roof. They lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus. Jesus was clearly impressed. And then he says these kind of startling words. When he saw their faith, He said to the paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Which raises the question, "Didn't the man that was on the mat have to somehow express faith in Jesus in order for healing to take place in his life?" Well, my explanation is the paralyzed man's faith was expressed by being willing to get on that mat and be carried by the four friends. So he too expressed faith because of his willingness and his belief that Jesus could do something for him. As he was lowered through the roof, his faith literally was in place. So that's the third friend. The creative friend.

Friend #4. The fourth friend's name is Courage. Courage is to fight off fear. And boy, I don't remember a time in my life when there's been so much fear in the land. And if ever we need a friend named Courage, right now we sure do. The whole idea of courage is the opposite of fear. It's the dead opposite of fear. It's breaking through that wall of our present experience into the future that is unknown to us but known to God. Even in this period of time in which we are right now. There's so many unknowns. Here we are on the front end of our third lockdown. We hope it's over in four weeks and we hope that by the time we get to Canada Day, things will be some semblance of normality. But we don't know. Only at this point God knows what the future holds. Courage is to fight off fear. Someone of those four friends had to say, "Well, let's take our friend to Jesus." I wonder if any of them said, "Oh, that's not a very good idea." And I wonder if there was any process involved in all of them eventually becoming persons of courage? Hard to tell. The text doesn't tell us. But this fourth friend is the courageous one. The one that fights off fear and says, "We're going to do this and we're going to battle through our fears and come to this place where we express our courage."

So here we are. Four friends. Compassion, Perseverance, Creativity, and Courage. When you've got friends like these, you're going to get to Jesus. Well, I have two challenges for you this morning. I wish that the sanctuary was full as it was so many times on Good Friday because if it was I would have involved you in a little exercise right now. And so, I want you to do this in your homes, if you will. I hope already that some of you have said, "Hmmm, of those four people, I think this is the one that I am." And maybe those of you living together who have family under the same roof at this time, we could make this part of your noon conversation. The first challenge I have for you this morning is to be one of these four friends. All of these friends were needed in order for God's plan and purpose to take place. No one is more important than the other. Again, that fits with 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, where Paul expresses the wonderful gifts of the Spirit and says that all of these gifts are important and for the body to be healthy. I really believe that this is what Jesus had in mind when he said, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I really believe that this is how God's kingdom comes on earth - when we are who we're supposed to be in Christ.

And as we find that gift and we are that person, that character name, that that in fact brings about God's purposes on this earth. So talk about which one of these four friends you are. If we were together, I would have people stand. Which one of these four are you? And my hunch is if that were to happen in a congregation like Living Hope, when it was all said and done, we would have all kinds of people representing all four characters who would be standing throughout the sanctuary. Again, reflecting the health of the body and the reality that the body is diverse and that we need each other. And the kingdom of God requires everyone in order for God's purposes to be fulfilled. So that's the first challenge. Be one of these four friends.

The second challenge is this. If you need these four friends to carry you to Jesus today, ask for help. See, not all conditions and diseases are on the outside. There's an awful lot on the inside. Especially during these times in which we live. Tell someone what's going on inside you. That's not a sign of weakness, that's a signal of strength. If you can express what you're feeling and how you are going through a challenging time. That's a sign of strength. In my pastoral life, I had all kinds of conversations with people who were going through troubling experiences. And so many times, I thought, "I only wish we had heard this story six months ago. It's almost too late. I'm not sure. The horse is out of the barn and the barn doors are swinging in the wind. I mean, I don't know how we can put Humpty Dumpty together again." Ask for help before Humpty Dumpty falls off the wall. And if you haven't got four friends, I pray that the Lord will

bring one friend to your mind. Because that's really all you need to get started. You may need all four friends before the process is over before help and healing comes, but start with one.

So, the mystery is solved. The four friends of the paralytic are revealed. Not their first and last names but their character names. Compassion - to feel. Perseverance - to carry on. We will get through this. Creativity - to see beyond the present situation. We can't go through the front door, let's go through the roof. Courage - to fight off fear.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for this remarkable revelation of who you are and what you're able to do. Thank you as well for these four friends. Now, their posterity lives on because of their faithfulness to a friend. We pray that you would help each of us in these days to reach beyond the lockdown that we're in. And to do our very best to carry each other's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. And we'll be careful to give you the praise. In your precious Holy name. Amen.

Transcribed by Liza Perry

