



Best of Friends (Luke 5:17-26)

Many years ago my wife and I went for a camping holiday in Germany and Italy. We camped one night in the Alps between Germany and Austria. It was Julie Andrews country with the rugged peaks and the pretty alpine villages. It was a glorious evening and because we were only there for one evening and the site was made up of hard gravel which we did not have alpine pegs and heavy hammer, we only pegged down with a few pegs. As night went on, the glorious starlit evening turned into a thunderstorm with high winds. We were in our sleeping bags and we had to get up quickly and hold on to the tent frame for dear life as it started to head skywards. We felt helpless as we hung on for dear life. But then a wonderful sound greeted us. It wasn't the Sound of Music but the Dutchman from the well-secured tent next door. With the words "I help you", he proceeded to peg the tent down using a very heavy hammer. We were rescued. The uncanny thing was, that within about half an hour getting back into our sleeping bags the storm stopped and the stars reappeared. But we were rescued and very fortunate that there was someone to help us.

Of course, I'm sure that if the position were reversed any of us would do the same. When we have the resources to rescue someone who needs help, it's a natural thing to want to help. Our situation was one of those trivial mishaps on holiday but we live in a world where people find themselves in helpless or extremely difficult situations they feel helpless in. Maybe you're there right now. Without money, caught in a debt trap; suffering an illness or a disability we can't cope with, having problems at work, stuck in a rut; feeling there's nothing we can do; at the mercy of others. Feeling helpless.

And of the man in our story? He was helpless. He was not able to walk in a world where there was little sympathy for disability. He couldn't work in the fields it meant that he probably had to beg for a living. He needed rescue and of course he found it in more ways than one – and his life was transformed.

I don't know how well you know Luke's gospel. Luke deals with profound issues, like Jesus being the Son of God but it is so well presented nothing comes across as though it were rocket science. Faith comes across in a natural way. People coming to Jesus was a natural thing. Bringing people to Jesus was a comfortable and natural thing. And there was Jesus, ready and willing to show compassion on all those who came - or who were brought to Him who were like the man in our story - helpless, sick, and needing Jesus.

In Luke chapter 4, Jesus quotes words from Isaiah which apply to Him: *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.* And as we read Luke's Gospel and the others too, we see that prophecy in action as Jesus deals with all those issues whether they were physical or spiritual.

And as we go down the chapters we see that people were excited to see Jesus, hear His words, watch His miracles. We read in our passage that there were those from the Jewish

establishment who came to inspect what Jesus was doing and criticize His actions. But no-one seemed bothered they were there – it didn't seem to stop people bringing their friends to Jesus. Jesus could change lives – why should they be bothered by the kill-joy skeptics who tried to pour cold water on it all.

And down 2000 years by we have the same Saviour who can transform people's lives. We know that. We know how exciting it was when we decided to follow Jesus that first time. We can see that excitement on people that have come to Christ recently. And we know that we are called to spread the Good News about Jesus the way that it was obviously getting around in these early days of Jesus' ministry. I know as a Church that's something you endeavour to do as a fellowship and you have some great ministries.

But sometimes when it comes to telling our friends and neighbours about Jesus we find it difficult don't we. There are some people who seem to be about to tell anyone about Jesus anywhere, anytime. In my previous church we had a friend called Joseph who took every opportunity to share his faith. If he arrived early at church, he would take the bus to Finsbury Park and then catch another back. This would give him the opportunity to sit next to someone who he would then engage them in conversation about Christ.

But maybe you're thinking "that's not me. I'd never have the guts to do that". Neither would I. We are all called to be witnesses, but not witnesses in the same kind of way. I'd say that most of us when faced with the prospect of telling somebody who isn't a Christian about Jesus feel more like this!

The trouble is, that we hear the great Commission, we see those like Joseph doing their bold things and we hear preachers (like me) encouraging us to spread the Good News and we feel inadequate. I don't know how many times I've been made to feel inadequate as a believer. Perhaps it's the same for you and you feel discouraged.

But Jesus never intended us to be discouraged by the Good News. Because Good news is Good News – it should be exciting like all Good News. Think of how you feel when something happens in your life – a new job, a new addition to the family, an exciting holiday or whatever. You pick up the phone or whatever and tell someone.

Yet the Good News about Jesus? Why are we so discouraged. I think it is because many involved in evangelism and evangelistic schemes do things their way – which works for them and possibly other people too. But is that the way it happened in Scripture? No. We look at Luke's gospel and we find people bringing others to Jesus in a perfectly comfortable and natural way. Nobody seems to have had our hang-ups.

Take a Gopak table for example. There are many ways of getting one of these down. Many people find these so difficult to put down that they have to get others to help or just leave it to someone else. Did you know that these lightweight tables are supposed to be handle-able easily by one person. There are many ways of getting one of these down – and then there's the right way.

And as we look in Luke's Gospel we see a lame man healed and forgiven because of four people – friends, relatives or whatever who brought him to Jesus. And it seems no big deal for them to have done it and there seems nothing that was going to stop them doing It's called friendship. Jesus said John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. Have you ever had a close friend? If you have, you'll do anything for them – even hack up someone's roof if you think it will get them out of trouble. We've all been in situations in life where we've taken costly or risky chances to help a friend. If we care, we don't question doing so. That's what friends do. It's the same when we share Jesus with them it. So what can we learn from them?

- **Compassion** - they helped the man because they genuinely cared. Their witness was because they cared for the person. It would be lovely to think that each of us care for everyone we come across. But there are those that we are closer to or we see as particularly helpless who we feel we are able to help. We are not all Joseph – prepared to witness on any bus anywhere. We aren't all the same. Never feel guilty because God has made you – you.

But He wants you to be a witness and he has already given you people you care about who are unbelievers and you are comfortable with them. That's your mission field. It doesn't have to be a multitude – it may be just one person.

And what did these people do to the lame man. Preach to him; give him a tract; invite him the church? No they met him where he was and helped him with his lameness. It isn't always appropriate to go for the jugular and give them the whole gospel all at once. Yes they need it, but do what's appropriate to them and you first and meet them where they are and that might be being for them at a time of need. Because in doings so, they might not hear all the words they need to hear, but they've met Jesus – because they've met you.

- **Commitment** - they took risks to get the man to Jesus. These people were prepared to vandalize a house to get the man to Jesus? How did they know they were not going to be arrested. What about the repair bill? It probably cost them financially to see their friend healed. They had compassion – love – and as a result took risks to see this man walk. Bringing someone to Christ is costly – literally – but do you know – that often isn't a problem when you are doing it for a friend or a relative. In fact they will accept the words you speak of Christ once they have seen you prepared to count the cost for them and see Jesus in you. This isn't rocket science or complex theology. It's life and we have no problem understanding it. We can all do it.
- **Consequence** And finally, they meet Jesus and the lame man gets to meet Jesus and got more than he bargained for. Jesus forgives him his sins. Now not all sickness comes as a result of sin. I could easily do a series of Bible studies on the causes of sickness – but not today. In the case of this man it did and it seems that people probably knew that. The man came lame asking to be healed – Jesus met his real need – to be forgiven . That was the consequence of meeting Jesus. We sometimes are afraid to talk about Jesus because we think we don't know much don't we. Never worry about that. Meeting Jesus is a spiritual thing. It's a work of the Spirit of God, so they'll get there despite us – they always do.

Do you know Jesus this morning? Have you accepted Him into your life as Saviour and Lord. Do you know forgiveness of sins? If you haven't then I'm going to give you an opportunity in a few moments to deal with your ultimate real need, to know Jesus in your life. To know God's forgiveness for what you have done wrong in your life (the Bible calls that sin) and to have that promise and hope of eternal life in Christ.

I expect most of us are believers here this morning. When witnessing, God doesn't want us to be someone else – He just wants us to be what He has made us – and recognize that in the relationships He has given us, people that we know and trust and know and trust us, is our mission field and these are people who we can speak easily with. Perhaps we just don't know where to start. Let me suggest where. Let's be scriptural. Where did the man land up in our story – at the feet of Jesus. So start there. Pray for them daily. Ask God for opportunities to be Jesus to them. Don't be worried what to say – they'll come to you. Prayer works the other way too. You're having coffee and they tell you some problem. You'd love to give them a superb spiritual answer but you know you just can't do it. Then

just say “Can I pray for you?” Most people will say yes. You don’t have to do it there and then out loud. Go home and do it. People often have little expectation of prayer – but those sort of prayer are often answered in style! You could of course just help them if you can.

I hope what I have share with you is an encouragement to you. The church in this country today needs Jesus. We could talk about grand schemes of evangelism. But actually, where the battle will be won is not really in big crusades, or in evangelistic campaigns, or organized events – although all these have a part. It’s won over coffee, it’s won when the helping hand is given, it’s won because someone showed love and care – and particularly, it’s won in that quiet place where you commune with God. Let me finish by saying this. There have been many surveys done of what or who has been most instrumental in bringing someone to Christ. In every survey ever done, there is just one that always is the overwhelming factor – the witness of friends and relatives.

God has given you a mission field. They are people you know, people you love, people you are comfortable with who don’t know Christ. They are friends. God has called you to them. The difference will start in our lives when we bring them to Jesus. Lets start praying them into the kingdom.

The most eloquent prayer is the prayer through hands that heal and bless. The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless. Billy Graham

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Scripture quotes NIV unless otherwise stated*