

Luke 5.12-39 A Calling To Serve Part B WWC 02.11.24

Good morning. The Lord bless you and give you peace. Our consideration this morning brings us to the latter section of the passage we began last week. We remember that Luke introduces his reader, who was as you know from **chapter 1** a man named Theophilus, to Peter and his fishing business partners. Before Luke describes the events which we sit read, he wants his readers to know *what Peter and his friends were called to see and learn from Jesus*. **Here we see the first steps of discipleship, mentoring in and under the word through observation.** This reminds us of the strong mentoring that prepared the majority of people for their vocations up until recently. If there was a career path that you wanted outside of the career path that a family member could mentor you in, you had to apprentice under someone. This was true even in the medical field for quite some time in our own country. Marjorie's great grandfather was a postman and also apprenticed under a physician so that he could, as they say in Appalachia, doctor people. He was one of the last group of apprenticed physicians in our nation who could serve as a physician though he had not gone to medical school. When he was delivering mail, if a family needed medical care, they would tie something white to the mailbox, often a pillowcase, and he would know to come in and do his doctoring. By the end of his career of mail delivery and doctoring people, he rode over 27000 miles up and down those Appalachian Mountains in East Tennessee. Jesus called the disciples not only to learn how to walk as Christian's seeking Christ, but ultimately to be disciples of Christ which could make other disciples. He basically apprenticed them into their field both in formal teaching as he taught in their presence and taught them on their journeys from one town to another, and in showing them how to work with those whom they would come into contact later their own ministry. What we read about here in Luke are 4 records, 4 stories, that communicate essential qualities that must reflect in the life of all disciples, especially those called to specific types of service, in the case of Peter, for instance, the service of elder and apostle to the Christian church. These four stories are, taking risks for those seeking to be made clean, staying faithful to the audacious call to forgiveness of sin, being immovable in our purpose, and rejoicing in the gifts of grace. I want to then consider an application to Peter.

.I. Taking Risks for Those Seeking to Be Made Clean. Verses 12-16 To the original audience and readers not in the context of modern medicine, this story that Luke highlights right after Jesus calls these disciples is a story of shock. Leprosy is known as Hansen's Disease, though in the Old Testament Law, leprosy was a more general term describing any skin disorder. What is known as Hansen's disease is a bacterial infection that affects the skin, nerves and respiratory system and it needs medical intervention through a variety of antibiotics, and the treatment is quite long. As I read on the WHO web page, it can take from 6 months to a year to treat leprosy. In **Leviticus 14:35-46** we are

told that a person with leprosy, whether it was Hansen's disease or not, was to isolate and live outside of the community. Whenever the person had to interact with the community, they had to cover their mouth and call out that they were unclean. Anyone who touched an unclean person was to be considered unclean themselves and would have to isolate outside of the community for a period of time. Perhaps beyond a statement of prayer this is another reason why Luke records that Jesus would withdraw to desolate places, as we see in **verse 16**. I don't think it is a stretch to say that people feared those who had leprosy, and the leprosy feared what was awaiting them through this disease. And here everyone watched as this man came to Jesus and fell on his face to beg Jesus to heal him. I love the phrase, don't you? "**Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.**" Jesus responds positively and demonstrably. "**Jesus stretched out hand and touched him saying, "I will; be clean.**" The Greek for "I will; be clean" is two words, **thelo katharistiki** (**Luke 5:13 Θελω καθαρισθητι**). They are as brief and powerful as the immediacy of the response. The diseases, we are told, left immediately, and Jesus then instructs him to follow the requirements of the Law of God.

I need to pause here for a moment because there is a common argument that is given by those who will not accept Jesus Christ and His teaching. It is that they have lived too evil a life, too dark and too broken for Jesus do want to do anything or for Jesus to do anything to forgive them and make them new. Please consider this story. Those without recourse, those desperate and disparate, find healing in the Son of God who is not afraid of where they have been, or too incapable of healing and cleansing them from what they have done. If you are there, be free in Christ. Rest in Him! He will not forsake you.

Again, we have to keep in mind what Luke is presenting to his readers. This is no longer a story of people observing. Jesus now has men that He is training and developing. **5:11** tells us that Peter left everything and followed Christ. It's one thing to leave livelihood to follow Jesus, but what about health? When it comes to the deliverance of people who are under the vestige of the brokenness of this life and the corruption of sin, there is no risk Christ would not take for their deliverance, and it is the mentor's example to His apprentices. And how this animated not only the lives of the apostles, apostles, whom Paul says were treated as a the offscouring of the earth in **1 Corinthians 4:13**, but also the lives of Christians for centuries when plagues hit the shores of communities! ***You see, the powerful quality of this example is that it is not given to Peter the Apostle, as if it were only a potential exposure that apostles would bear, but this is given to Peter and the others with him as an example of discipleship.*** We all as Christians should ask the question, **is my pursuit of Christ strong enough to place myself in positions of risk for the sake of those who need the grace that God?**

Taking risks for those seeking to be made clean and staying faithful to the

audacious call to forgiveness of sin.

.II. Staying Faithful to the Audacious Call to Forgiveness of Sin. Verses

17-26. I am considering that this section shocks us because it takes our responsibility to a higher plain than humanitarianism, or philanthropic enterprise, or community wellbeing endeavors. The actions of Jesus in seeking to forgive this man before he healed him show us several things. **First**, they force the answer to the question that the religious people around Jesus rightfully asked, “**who can forgive sins but God alone?**” Jesus is Emanuel, God with us. Will they believe it? Will you believe it? **Secondly**, Jesus underscores that the power through which this man must be healed demands the *same power through which this man is forgiven of sin*. Notice that in **verse 23**. And **finally**, the man with whom Jesus is interacting was bound by a much more terrifying reality than the brokenness of his body. He was bound by the brokenness of his soul which left him under the jeopardy of God’s wrath, and only Jesus would be able to fix that. He is, as we recall the words of John the Baptist, the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is the One of whom God the Father said, “**You are my Son, with whom I am well pleased.**” This Jesus, as we consider from the full gospel account, was the One who had authority to forgive sins because He was the One to whom was given the task of advocacy for mankind. He would be broken that we might be made whole. Please hear me. *Any deviation from the audacious call to forgiveness of sins as the primary reason we do any good work will minimize the significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and wholly disparages His example.* Peter, Christian, this is the focus of our lives if we would serve Him well! It is no wonder, then, that the next section of our text should cause us to consider the immovable purpose Christ reflects in His life here on this earth, and to which He attends even in heaven as He prepares a place for us.

Taking risks for those seeking to be made clean, staying faithful to the audacious call to forgiveness of sin, and being immovable in our purpose.

.III. Being Immovable in Our Purpose. Verses 27-32.

We need to be careful in this section. There is a bent as we mature in Christianity to see this as a call to seek those with the most sordid qualities of life and befriend them for the gospel’s sake. That is not incorrect, but it doesn’t take into account the breadth of this statement. Jesus, in defense of His interactions with Levi and Levi’s friends says in **verse 32**, “**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**” We must remember that Jesus is working within the framework of honoring all that the scriptures said about Him, and as such, any passage of scripture in the Old Testament that speaks to Christ’s person is a passage that gives us insight into understanding the full intent of Jesus’s words. Consider as defense of my statement two passages of scripture. **First** of all, at the end of the gospel of Luke there is a story about two disciples, Peter and another

disciple of Christ. They were devastated from the crucifixion of Christ and were in disbelief regarding Christ's resurrection. Jesus somehow disguised Himself and appeared to them. **Luke 24:27** says that “**beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.**” **Again**, in **Matthew 5:17** we are told by Christ that He has come to fulfill all the law and the prophets. How does this inform our point? One of those prophetic passages concerning Christ is that famous section in Isaiah regarding the Suffering Servant who takes our sin and punishment for sin. **Consider these verses in light of our text. First** a prophetic Psalm that gives Isaiah His meditative poem. **Psalm 53:1–3** (ESV): “**1 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. 2 God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. 3 They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.**” **And now the prophet Isaiah** in **53:6** (ESV): “**6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**” *The point of Christ's statement to those who listened to Him was not to underscore that the Pharisees and scribes were righteousness, but we in as much need as the most egregious sinner.* The Pharisees and the scribes were just as lost as the commoner. And Luke is committed to that message as we can see later in the narrative of the prodigal son. In that narrative it is both children that are in desperate need of a proper relationship with their father, though both manifest their disdain for their father in different ways. **Being immovable in purpose means that we are as committed to seeing Christ in the lives of good clean people who think they are saved, as much as seeing Christ in people that have lent themselves to every pleasure of life as they seek to get some fleeting joy in life before they die.** Christian brother or sister in Christ, which kind of Christ-less sinner are you most comfortable with? It is important to note because you might be inclined to ignore their lack of salvation more than that of someone with whom you have clear controversy. And for those of you who are not Christian, please consider that the only true safe space is Jesus. He can call out the hypocrisy in any camp and still love us by calling us to Himself. No worldview has the power to recreate that.

Taking risks for those seeking to be made clean, staying faithful to the audacious call to forgiveness of sin, being immovable in our purpose, and rejoicing in the gifts of grace.

.IV. Rejoicing in the Gifts of Grace. **Verse 33-39** This may seem like a strange story to include along with a call to discipleship, the healing of a leprosy person, and the story of all of our sinful states when we are outside of Christ's grace. At first glance it is like, really? All of that build up and you include a story about fasting? But here is **the point** that Jesus is underscoring.

He has come to rescue us from that which condemns us. Do you remember the passage I recited from Matthew? It was that Jesus had come to fulfill all the law and the prophets. What was the law of God? It was a means of finding opportunity to be at peace with God via God's covenants, but it never took away man's sin. It was always anticipating the One true Lamb who would come and be our substitute **so that we no longer have to be encumbered by the requirements of the law and its consequent religious expressions**; do not eat, do not touch, do not handle, fast these days and don't ignore those days. The law was good, but its purpose was not to save anyone. Its purpose was to cause people to place their faith in the One whom God would send to do and to fulfill all that we could not. This is Paul's argument in **Galatians 3:25**. The law is our tutor, our guardian, but in Christ we are set free from the law because we are now sons and daughters of God. Jesus was challenging His audience and is challenging every audience that comes under the tutelage of Luke's gospel with an implied question, will we be happier with that which binds us but we are familiar with, or will we be found joyfully living in the freedom of Christ?

Galatians 4:1–7 (ESV): “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Peter, disciples, this is where we live successfully and joyfully as Christians. In this frame of mind and in this direction of life.

.V. Applied to Peter. When we read Peter's life with Christ and even into Peter's ministry, we see a very human person. His failures have been annotated in the pages of our New Testament so that we might learn from him and keep from the same failures by God's grace. But it is interesting to see that Peter lived in this spirit of grace that Jesus afforded, he had to if he would live in freedom and not in guilt for his failures. We see as well that Peter annotates everything we have spoken about as especially necessary for the office of elder in a church. We do not have time to scour through and do that study, but I would encourage you to outline these principles of our message in **1 Peter 5**. There Peter identifies not as an apostle, but as a fellow elder, a fellow prebyteros, (Πρεσβυτερος). What was an elder supposed to do? He was to shepherd the church of God. This is important because it connects all the passages of how God cares for His people as a shepherd cares for His sheep. He was also to **exercise oversight**, **episcopoyntes** (επισκοπουντες) over the flock. The word translates as overseer, it can describe a “**see to it**” person, and

if the English would allow it, we could translate this as a “[see-to-it-er](#).” Think about it as a ***vigilant state of observation and preparation of the church so that God’s people can thrive***. It is why Paul connects eldership with the gift of teaching. The battle of the heart and mind and the protection of the soul is not won by physical means, but by spiritual means through the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. These are gifts and characteristics that must be present in the life of anyone who is to hold this office of elder, and in a moment, I will ask our two elder candidates to come forward. But in this we must also ask a question, are we willing to be shepherded? God has not called us to an organization or business. If we are called to be served by shepherds, then we are called to the flock of God which is led.

We are, today, ordaining two men, Alex and Brian to the eldership of this church as ruling elders. God has given us such mercy in building up our body and leadership that we have had to organize our elder team into two parts, ruling elders and teaching or shepherding elders. We all function together in the care of the church, and all of us can teach in varying degrees. We all come together to discuss the direction and care needs of the body, but there are times when a final decision must be made, and it is our conviction that we see wisdom dictating that the group of people who have the final say are composed ***primarily*** of non-vocational elders. Simply stated, the majority of people getting paid to serve pastorally, in a shepherding manner, are not the ones with the final say on direction. All of our pastors serve as elders, but I am the only one from our staff who at this point serves with the ruling elders, and even then, I am never in conversations pertaining to remuneration. Our ruling elders are Jeff, Jeff, Tim, Bob, and me. Our pastoral elders are Ben, Christian, and me. Allen is currently in the process of pastoral ordination preparation. These men this morning are not being ordained in the sense of a pastoral ordination. That ordination, although there is no clear biblical distinction with what we do this morning, is an ordination with some civil authority, for instance in the case of weddings, and it is also what many churches recognize as a means through which people can serve as pastors. We have not combined the two out of a desire to help distinguish ordination for anyone desiring to perform weddings and hold all the civil or legal distinctions of being ordained, or who might end up serving in another church or denomination that demands a certain standard for ordination. I know that it is a bit technical, but welcome to the geeky world of church polity.

But as I said, this is a time in which we will set these two men apart, Alex and Brian, that they might serve our body as elders. Our consideration of the text this morning serves as a backdrop for what we expect from everyone that serves in leadership here at Westwood. As Christ said it, let him who would be first be servant of all. We’ve observed these men quietly for a much longer time than we mentored them formally. The formal process of mentoring has lasted more than 2 ½ years. They were of course under strict guidelines not to

mention the process as the process is not a guarantee of eldership but an opportunity to be vetted formally. We are excited for them, for you, and for what God will do in our body that would require more men of their gifting and maturity. I would ask them to come forward now, and I would ask Tim, Jeff, and Jeff, and Ben to come up for our time of prayer and dedication of these men.