

## “YOU KNOW THE WAY, SO DON’T GET LOST”

### Luke 5:12-26

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If you don’t care about where you’re going it’s remarkably easy to get there.

If you have nothing as your target, you’ll hit the bull’s eye with amazing accuracy.

Sad to say, that’s the norm for millions of people and a lot of organizations. They claim to have a purpose, but you’d never know it. They’re busy doing things that don’t really matter.

The English novelist George Eliot (actually a pen name for a woman, Mary Ann Evans) wrote in her 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, *Mill On the Floss*, “I flutter all ways, and fly in none.”

People and organizations—even churches—are busy, going nowhere.

Ships and planes have to make constant course corrections. If they don’t, they’ll never reach their intended destination.

A church must stay true to its intended course; otherwise it too will become lost.

- Before our Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven he made it clear what kind of people his followers were to be, and what they were to do in his name. Those are still the guide for his people and for his church.

But there are unremitting forces to move a church off-course. Some are bold; some are subtle—and they’re the most dangerous.

Tragically, many churches have been shipwrecked because they didn’t make the necessary course corrections. They once knew the way, but they didn’t stay on track and they got lost.

- Let me tell you why this is so important.

When Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection he said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

As a church we are a community of Christ’s followers, sent into the world by our Lord. Let us be certain that we follow in his footsteps and we don’t get lost.

- It’s not easy to stay the course that our Lord has given us.

It’s easier to go with the flow of society’s trends. Just add some religious flavoring to social mores, make people feel good about themselves and don’t try to make them change—and you may have a popular “church.”

But that’s far from the path Christ set for his followers.

According to Jesus Christ, a lot of people who claim to be his followers will hear him say at the judgment, “I never knew you. Away from me . . .” (Matthew 7:23)

I think most of you are here at Crossroads because you believe this church is basically on track with the purpose Christ has given us.

I hope you also want to make sure we stay the course.

- Our Scripture text today is Luke 5:12-26.

<sup>12</sup> *While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

<sup>13</sup> *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.*

<sup>14</sup> *Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."*

<sup>15</sup> *Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.*

<sup>16</sup> *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

<sup>17</sup> *One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.*

<sup>18</sup> *Some men came carrying a paralytic 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 that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." 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."*

In Luke 5:12-26 we find some crucial guidelines for staying on course and relating to people Christ's way.

### **I. RESPOND TO URGENT NEEDS. Luke 5:12-16**

Crossroads is smack in the middle of a culture with oodles of people in crisis.

Some have brought a crisis on themselves, and they know it. Others don't know why bad things happen to them.

Just as Jesus Christ was in touch with messed up people, so he expects his followers to be in touch with a hurting world.

- Jesus was deeply moved with compassion for lost and hopeless people, as Pastor James emphasized last week (Matthew 9:36).

Jesus did not turn away from needy people.

And that is exactly how Christ's Church must fit into society. We get involved with hurting people.

If the only people we are in close touch with are our fellow-Christians, we drift off-course and get lost.

- What does a church look like if it's on the course Christ has set for us?

You will find people who are still struggling with major issues. But they feel loved and accepted. They feel that their church is a safe place where they can heal and recover and become strong.

- How does a church get to be like that? Do hurting people just happen to turn into the church parking lot some Sunday morning?

Not jolly likely!

Hurting people don't just happen to turn into the church parking lot on a Sunday morning. No, it's because Christ's followers who comprise the church are in touch and get involved with people whose lives are messy.

Then, at some point they say, "I'd like you to come to church with me and meet some great people whose lives have also been changed, and you should get to know them."

A church like that has people with serious health problems fighting the good fight, surrounded by people who love and support them. It has people struggling with a marriage on the rocks; it has people dealing with alcoholism or substance abuse or gambling—and they don't have to pretend that they're squeaky-clean.

Christ reached out to people as they were, and he wants his church to welcome people with messed up lives. I heard someone say that coming to church just as we are is like going into a clean house with white carpets.

You leave your dirty shoes at the door.

In church we don't trample the muck everywhere and flaunt our failures before others. We leave it at the door, and when we go out, we find that the Holy Spirit has cleaned our shoes for us.

That's a fairly accurate depiction of Christ's church.

- Look again at how Jesus was there for people in crisis.

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People were dead-scared of lepers. They took every precaution to avoid contamination.

Instead of having compassion toward lepers, most people had become callused toward them. They resented any lepers who came near.

Christians can also be so afraid of contamination—whether physical or moral—that it blocks the flow of their compassion.

- No one would have thought less of Jesus if he had turned away from the man. As a righteous man, Jesus would be keeping himself from defilement..

He had every right, by law and tradition, to have nothing to do with the fellow.

But, as the saying goes, the right to do something doesn't always mean it's the right thing to do.

- The disease had taken hold of this man. It wasn't a mild case of leprosy. The text says he was covered with leprosy. He was a hideous human spectacle.

We don't see anything these days that is anywhere near as grotesque as what this man looked like.

The disease of leprosy has now almost been eradicated in the world. But in places like India and Bangladesh you can find people who had the disease and lost limbs because of it. A few years ago I visited a hospital in India where a doctor was still treating people with the disease. She showed me a modern-day case. It was a young woman who looked perfectly normal, but she had a little patch of skin on her arm that was leprous. I thought to myself, 'Big deal! That's nothing to be concerned about.' But it would be if not treated with modern medicine.

- What did Jesus do? He reached out and touched the man.

Jesus made physical contact because he knew that words were not enough. The man was used to words—mostly nasty words.

This man had probably not been touched for many years.

No one has ever been more outgoing than Jesus. He went out from the glory of heaven to get close to fallen people, and touch them.

In his earthly ministry Jesus was in constant touch with people who were not like him.

- Young churches are often very strong in their outreach to people with messed up lives. But there is a tendency in older churches for members to focus more on themselves than on people out in the world. They care more and more about their own preferences and their traditions.

That will happen to a church that does not do regular course corrections.

- Some Christians think new people will come in if they change the style of music and make the services more appealing to un-churched people. That may help, a little.

But if you want Crossroads to fulfill its purpose, it's up to you. You have to be convinced that people need what we have here.

We have to go out and get our shoes dirty because we care for people, and bring them here when they're ready.

- If you're concerned that the filth of the world might stick to you, let me tell you something I've learned. Being exclusively with church people won't keep you clean and pure.

It may even harm you spiritually because you're only with people who are not doing what Christ said we should be doing.

The Bible tells us we're in a world under the control of evil (1 John 5:19). But the same verse tells us we are the children of God. That's where God has put his children.

- Each of us has a responsibility to make certain our church provides the kind of loving, caring, unshockable community where people in all kinds of trouble can feel safe and get in touch with Jesus Christ who makes something beautiful out of broken lives.

Jesus Christ has called us to follow him. If we do that, our feet will get dirty.

Yes, we can choose a clean, safe path for ourselves, but that is not where Jesus walked. We'd be off course.

Jesus was constantly out there with people who were considered society's scum. And they wanted to be with him.

To be like Jesus, to follow in his steps, means to get close enough to touch people who have urgent needs.

## **II. FOCUS ON ESSENTIAL NEEDS. Luke 5:17-26**

The things in other people that break our hearts and turn on our little faucets of compassion are things we can see—things we want to fix.

We want to see bodies mended, marriages healed, we want people to be freed from their destructive addictions. And that's good. Christ our Lord had that kind of compassion.

- But the most essential need people have is a right relationship with God. A healthy body and a happy home are not our most essential needs.

Jesus upset the religious establishment, not so much because he healed people and performed other miracles, but because he dealt with sin and with the forgiveness of sinners.

- A delegation of religious heavyweights from all over Israel had come to investigate Jesus.

But Jesus wasn't intimidated at all.

<sup>17</sup> *One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.*

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I don't think those stuffed bags of religious propriety would have been too perturbed if Jesus had only healed the man's legs. They would have enjoyed it. Some of them had traveled a long way to see Jesus do a miracle.

But Jesus boldly forgave the man's sins, and then healed him to boot!

Jesus knew they were furious. In their minds it was blasphemy for anyone except God to forgive sins.

They had that straight! That's precisely why Jesus could forgive sins.

Jesus made the point loud and clear that his power to heal was proof of his authority to forgive sins.

That's why he had come into the world—to deal with mankind's most essential need, sin. Just a short while after this Jesus had said he came to call sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32)

- The most serious problem all people have is sin.

What people need most is forgiveness of sins. People receive God's forgiveness by confessing their sin and by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

- We call this the gospel. It's the good news for messed up people everywhere.

If people see that you care about them just as they are, many will let you into their lives. God wants to use you to introduce them to Jesus Christ so that they can come into a life-changing relationship with God.

- The wonderful truth is that you and I can give the same assurance to people that Jesus gave to that man: "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

If people will renounce their sin and pray to Christ for forgiveness and put their faith in him as the only one who can save them, they will be completely forgiven by God, no matter how messed up and filthy their lives have been

That's what we call God's "amazing grace."

That's the course Christ set for his

Do you need to make some course corrections to follow in our Lord's footsteps?

How do you relate to people who are not like you? Do you go out of your way just to show them that you care? Do you listen to them?

How about starting today if you go to the restaurant for lunch? Don't just give your order. Smile and ask the server how he or she is doing. And leave a generous tip. Christians should be the best tippers. (That's in the gospel according to John—Crocker).