

You Are: #9 “Who You Befriend, Part 2” – Luke 5:15-26

Dr. Matt Cassidy – 4/10/2011

What a wonderful morning. There is good stuff to look at today. Before we do that, in your bulletin and at the welcome center, there are a bunch of these [postcard invitations] to give to friends and family members to come to Resurrection Sunday. It is just a few weeks away, April 24.

Easter here can be kind of crazy. I would like to appeal to regular attenders and members of Grace. We will have a little more than twice as many people attending as we usually do. That means there will be twice as many kids in the Children’s Ministry, twice as many cars in the parking lot, and twice as many potential things to do. We are asking you to be twice as nice. Here is what we would like you to do. If you could come early, that would be really good. The reason we want you to come early is so that you can park very far away. That makes sense if you are twice as friendly. First hour actually starts at 9:15 a.m. which is news to the 9:15 people. So we want you here at 9:10. If you have children, you can check them in early and then you could serve two services. Also, starting very soon, you can go to our web site and get a form to check children in, so if you are bringing neighbors who have children, they could print that form the night before, fill it out so that they can get right through that system. That checking in process sometimes backs up so we are trying to speed that up a little. Consider coming to both services; you can serve during one of those services in the Children’s Ministry.

There will not be any Adult Communities or the Youth Group meeting that Sunday, April 24, so they both can serve us by working the children’s ministry that day.

Before I talk on the passage today, why don’t we pray for Resurrection Sunday which is a very big day around here especially. Let’s ask God to make himself known.

Dear heavenly Father,

We are looking forward to the greatest day in human history, maybe the greatest day in all of history that we could celebrate.

There are so many people who come to church only a couple of times a year and this is one of those. Lord, I ask that we would be ready for them, that we would feel your presence. I know you are always present but that we would feel it in a special way, that your Spirit would work in the hearts of people, that you would be calling them right now, some of them just drive by and are prompted to come to church some day and they would look at our building and say – *This is the church and Resurrection Sunday is a great day to start.* –

Lord, we are asking that You would do nothing short of change people's lives in just a couple of weeks. We ask that You would put on our minds the people that you want us to ask and that you will give us the courage and fortitude to follow through and close the deal and ask them to come to church. Let your Spirit be moving with great strength in our lives and on that Sunday. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

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I am fascinated with World War II. I find myself looking at as many documentaries as I can. I have read a few books on that war. I don't know why actually. I think it may be because of the amount of valor that was required by our men, the Allied Forces, to be able to win that war. When I was studying it earlier on, I just thought, *Good grief, we were fortunate to be able to win that war.* As I studied it continually, I realized – *Wow, we were lucky to win that war.* Then as I have continued to delve even deeper, I thought – *Oh, God, we were supposed to lose that war. We really were.* It is God's fault that the Allied Forces won. It is eerie. The reason we have freedom right now is because of a tank of gas. We are alive because of a very thick desk. We don't have to hide minorities in our attics because for some unexplained reason, a northern breeze blew a morning fog away and allowed the Air Force to do what they needed to do.

Hundreds of millions of lives were saved by a speech, by one speech, a king's speech. It came down to that. Queen Elizabeth's father was able to make that speech because of who he befriended. He was assigned a friend by his wife because he needed someone to tell him what to believe and to make him behave. He could not do it without this friend. There is power in friends.

I want you to watch a video clip and be listening for the influence of what total trust in another human being can do. I want you to be listening for these keys: that you are what you believe, and how you behave, and how that is influenced by who you befriend. This friend will tell him, the king, what to believe and he will teach him how to behave. Because he did, you are sitting here today. Watch this.

The King's Speech trailer video:

Queen: My husband is required to speak publicly.

King: I have received ... [stammer] ...

Therapist: Perhaps he should change jobs.

Queen: And what if my husband were the king?

Therapist: Insert them (rocks) into your mouth. Enunciate.
I can cure your husband but I need total trust.

Therapist: What was your earliest memory?

King: I am not here to discuss personal matters.

Therapist: Why are you here then?

King: Because I bloody well stammer.

Therapist: Do you know any jokes?

King: Timing isn't my strong suit.

Man: War with Germany will come and we will need a king who we can all stand behind.
He is afraid of his own shadow.

King: The nation believes that when I speak, I speak for them. But I can't speak.

Therapist: You could do it. You can even be governed by fear.

King: I feel like mad King George the Stammerer.

King: Get up! You can't sit there! Get up!

Therapist: Why not? It is just a chair.

King: That is St. Edward's chair. Listen to me!

Therapist: Why should I waste my time listening to you?

King: Because I have a voice.

Therapist: Yes you do.

Your greatest test is yet to come.

[news clip of Hitler speaking in German]

Child: What is he saying?

King: I don't know but he seems to be saying it rather well.

Therapist: Your first war time speech.

Man: Broadcast to the nation and the world.

Man 2: This great time of crisis.

King: However this turns out, I don't know how to thank you.

Therapist: You are the bravest man I know.

Queen: I intend to be a very good queen to a very great king.

Therapist: Forget everything else and just say it to me.

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You are the bravest man I know. Believe that.

Say what you are going to say but say it to me.

You are how you behave.

Choose Your Friends Carefully

You are who you befriend so choose carefully. There is so much power in friendships. I want you to leave today with at least that strong conviction that there is power in friendships. You can ask any school teacher. You can ask any coach, human resource expert, or counselor. They will tell you that the right type of person entering into the equation can change everything in the classroom, on the team, in the context of the office place, or in a counseling room. If the right person comes in and befriends the people, it changes everything. That is why they give "Rudy Awards" [reference to 1993 movie "Rudy"] and not Judas Awards because if we can get a Rudy on this team or in this company or in this classroom, it could alter what we do and what we believe and who we are.

There is almost limitless power in friendships. You are who you befriend and so you need to choose carefully.

Harry Sullivan was the pioneer of interpersonal psychology. He says this; it is therapy in a nutshell.

It takes people to make people sick, and it takes people to make people well. He built his whole structure on the fact that you are who you befriend. Friends in the context of what we have been speaking on for nine weeks now are the instruments that God sometimes uses to say – *You are what the Bible says – tsadik – righteous. You received this not because of what you did. On the contrary, it is what Jesus did for you.* Now let's just keep memorizing together – Romans 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 until we

get this. Let's think right. Then, let's just do this until we believe it and let's do this together. That is what good friends do because they have this power.

Luke 5:15 - 26 – Friends of the Paralytic

There is no better story, I think anyway, in the Gospels than the story found in Luke 5 about friendship. Turn to Luke 5:25-26 in your Bibles and you will see that it is a story of friendship. It is a story of extraordinary commitment to one another, and especially to this one individual that the story revolves around who is a paralyzed man.

To grasp what is happening here, you have to get a little deeper understanding of what that means 2000 years ago in the Middle East. This man is paralyzed which means his existence is on a 4 x 6 foot mat; that is his life. He just is imprisoned on that. He has no independence. He needs someone to care for him, to clothe him, to feed him, to bathe him, and to do pretty much everything for him. If he is going to be transported, he will need someone to carry him. Again, it is 2000 years ago, and so there is no surgery, no physical therapy, there is no hope. In the day, they did not suffer people like this very well. It was not uncommon for people to be left for dead. They would just leave them to die out in the hot sun, to dehydrate. They could not contribute to society. All they could do is sit on a 4 x 6 foot mat and beg and appeal to people's kindness.

Then you have the weight of the blanket of the religious culture at the time that is even pervasive today, that is the superstitious belief that he had this coming. *He did something; he deserved this. Now he is just paying his dues. That is reason enough that I am not going to help him.* It is common. You will see it even in the writings of the Gospels that when they find a person like this, or a blind person, they would say – *Well, who sinned? What did he do to get that because obviously he earned it?*

With all that hanging over him, he has all these voids in his life of no hope, no transportation, nothing ... except friends. He apparently has four very good friends. This is the greatest small group of all time. There is no story without these friends; no friends, no story because they can't get this person to be in a room with Jesus. The story is about Jesus, certainly, but it is also about the power of friendships and how you are who you befriend.

Luke 5:15, 16 Yet the news about Jesus spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

:17 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.

So He is teaching and He has the assets to be able to heal the sick at this time.

:18 Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

Cost of Friendship

Before we go on with the story anymore, let me tell you about their friendship. These four men have befriended this paralytic for some reason, because friendships are costly. Friendships are expensive. There is nothing easy about this. In this context, there is a social stigma attached to this paralytic, no doubt because that is the cultural norm. There is nothing in it for these people. What could the paralytic man give to them? Not much. So in many regards, this is a one-way relationship and they are going to serve this man.

Priority

But that is kind of the nature of friendships. In our lives we have to see that there is a cost associated with them and that is one of the things I want to talk about today primarily, that we need to make friendships a priority because if we don't prioritize having a good friend, it never happens. We just stay busy. We have to make it a goal. We have financial goals and we maintain those because they are a priority in our lives. We have our busy schedule goals and we are running from errands to errands to errands because they are a priority. I want to say today, friendships should be a priority because they affect who we are.

Time

The most treasured asset we have today is time. If making friends and being a good friend is not a priority, it does not make it on to our calendar. You can't fit friendships into the cracks of your schedule that are left over. You can't microwave things like deep intimacy and marriage and parenting. You just cannot hurry up conversations that have significance.

Last night, I was at something for my daughter and I received a phone call from a good friend who is having significant marriage problems. I was standing behind this cubicle but I knew – *I have got to get going here. The music is starting and I need to leave. Let's get to the really sad part fast.* – It was a conflict of priorities.

If we don't have margin in our lives for friendship, they don't happen. So we just have to build it in to be able to be able to have time to grieve with those who grieve and to celebrate with those who celebrate. That is what friendships are for. But we have to have time and it has to be a priority to make the time.

Acceptance

Another asset you have to have, another attribute of friendships is just the idea of acceptance because every one is really messed up. It is not just you. We all have our stuff. We all have our 4 x 6 mat that we lie on. We aren't always paralyzed, not all are stutterers but if you want to make a friend, you are going to find out that friend has a volcanic temper. They go from 0 to 100 pretty quick and you are going to be that person that speaks truth into their lives and then sits them down to say – *I am going to make you behave differently until you get good at this.*

There are some who are freaked out at fear and they can't control the lives around them. That is like stuttering. That is like the need for someone to speak to you and teach you to believe certain things about God that you don't believe now, to behave in a certain way, that reflects that belief.

Some people have these secrets or injuries or some kind of historical event in their lives and they have chosen to let that event determine who they are. But they mal-adapt and they make it hard to be friends with them, like being a friend with this paralytic.

That is the whole point of friendship – you have stuff and they have stuff and we are going to get through the stuff together. I think understanding that we are not alone in our mat dwelling is so healthy for us.

One of the things Melinda and I are doing now more and more when we are doing marriage counseling is somewhere in the times together we look for an opportunity to say – *Okay, I want you to go tell two of your friends that you are meeting with us or with someone because your marriage needs help, and this is an issue.* – Why would we do that? – Because I want you to see that you are not alone and you can help other people in this journey. If they come to Grace, this conversation can ensue. Are you coming to Grace? Are you in one of those adult communities that are life stage oriented? Yes. I want you to go and pull someone over and say – *Listen, I am really jealous of my newborn. I lost my wife in this thing and I sometimes feel threatened by this baby that I am supposed to be really happy about but I am not really happy. I am threatened and jealous. See what happens.* Guys will come out of the woodwork and say – You too? I thought it was just me. You sit on the same mat that I sit on.

Here is a quick little application before we move on with the passage. Who carries your mat? Who grabs the corners? Who is the person you can go to and say: Can you pray this thing for me? Can you help me out of this situation? Could you just listen to me talk this thing through?

Do you have a mat carrier? Do you have a friend?

Here is a great little phrase.

You choose who your friends will be and then they choose who you will be because you are who you befriend.

Choose carefully because you are who you befriend. You need a mat carrier. It needs to be the right kind of person. It needs to be a priority for you and for them. It is expensive time-wise and you need to be accepting and forgiving of one another.

Luke 5:19 Roof Crashers

Jesus is becoming famous for His healings. The four guys find out about that healing and they go to their friend who is paralyzed and say – *We have got to take you to go see Jesus.* – There is nothing in it for these four men. See how they are just thinking of their friend? Great description of what real friendship is.

I will just embellish a little bit. But let's pretend the guy on the mat does not believe that Jesus can heal him. Who cares? Friends tell you what to believe.

What if the guy on the mat does not want to go? He doesn't want to behave like he believes. That really doesn't matter, does it? Because he is paralyzed. What are you going to do? Run? We are grabbing the four corners of this thing and we are taking you with us.

They do but there is not enough room for them to get in. They show up late to the teaching session and they can't get in. But I really like about these guys is this formula: Faith + Desperation. You should see what Jesus does with Faith + Desperation because that is what these guys are. They are faithful but they are desperate.

Luke 5:19 When they could not find a way to do this [to get inside] 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.

They go upstairs. A lot of times they used the flat roofs for a balcony area. They are taking the shingles off this. But I love this Faith + Desperation. Jesus likes faithful and desperate people. He loves guys who will climb a tree because they are too short to see Him. He will spend the evening with that kind of guy.

He loves women who grab at his gown because they believe and they are desperate. He loves nagging mothers – He does. He is the one, the only one who loves nagging mothers because they are faithful and they are desperate and He can do something with that.

Again, here Jesus is teaching in a crowded place and people are even outside, looking in through the windows [a very common occurrence], but now everything is being distracted because stuff is falling down into people's eyes. Now we can see the open sky and the sun is blazing in. Then the four friends pick this man up by the four corners of his mat and they lower him right in front of Jesus. Good mapping by the way. And the people are just staring, thinking – What is going on? –

I love roof crashers. Roof crashing is when you are a friend with someone and you see a need and you do something. That is what roof crashing is. I am not promoting vandalism today. I am promoting positive things where you notice a friend is in need and then you actually do something, something maybe crazy. It could be that you just write a note and you tell them what to believe about what the Bible says is true and right and real. You pick up the phone and you call them. If you are driving down the highway and you get a picture of one of your friends in your mind, his name kind of pings you, that didn't just happen. Do something about that. Crash a roof. If you are in a store and you think of someone, you buy them something – their favorite candy. These sorts of things can change a person's life because you are who you befriend. You are the person who is going to speak these truths of righteousness into a fellow brother or sister that can alter the lives of maybe a lot of people, like *The King's Speech*. You choose who your friends will be; they choose who you will be. Choose carefully. Choose tsadik friends, ones who are righteous and believe this.

Luke 5:20 – More than you bargained for

So the paralytic is being lowered on his mat by the ropes and ...

Luke 5:20 When Jesus saw their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

This is interesting because most of the miracles take place because the person receiving the miracle is the one who is faithful. In this one, I am assuming it is the four guys, the friends, who have the faith. Now the roof opens up and Jesus sees the four faces of these men and four sets of hands. – "Hey, Jesus? You will take it from here, right?"

Luke 5:20 When Jesus saw their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Wow! That is not what he [the paralytic] bargained for. Your sins are forgiven. I mean, this man and his four friends showed up thinking he was just going to walk out of here. He gets his soul re-arranged.

I am trying to think – what is this like in our world. It would be like a homeless man spending a significant amount of time on the corner begging for change. He goes to the grocery store to buy a can of tuna – good protein, pretty cheap, and in an easy container. So he gets to the cash register and realizes he is thirty cents short of the price of the tuna. Maybe the person in back is generous enough or impatient enough to pay for the thirty-cent shortage. That is what he hopes for – all he is hoping for. When they swipe the can of tuna across the gizmo, it turns out he is the one-millionth customer of this grocery store and because of that, he gets a lifetime of groceries. That is what is happening here.

The paralytic shows up so that he can walk. Jesus says – Your soul is tsadik. This illness is temporary but for ever, for eternity, you are well. It was a good day for this paralytic. A lot happened that day.

Luke 5:21-26 Who can forgive sins but God?

What is happening theologically and it is unnerving to everyone is when Jesus says – Your sins are forgiven – you need to know that only God can forgive sins. If you sin against me, I can forgive you. But you sinned against God as well and only God can forgive you. That makes sense; that is logical. So for Jesus to say – Your sins are forgiven you – He is saying that He is God. That is going to stir people up. It is okay for Him to say that because He is and that is His whole point.

Verse 21 is getting back to what is happening in a bigger way.

Luke 5:21 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?”

:22-26 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? 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.”

Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

The Bible is somewhat known for understating and I think that is an understatement. ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’ Really? Yeah, I think you have too.

So silence breaks over the crowd. What are you doing, forgiving sins? Jesus says, *Which is tougher, forgiving sins or letting this man walk again?* He said, *You are healed.* So all of a sudden, the paralytic’s muscles begin to have strength and then apparently the spinal cord nervous reflexes get on

board and he has coordination. He just stands up and takes that mat and leaves. Now he has his soul healed and his body healed. He is free from the resentment he had toward other people, the jealousy he had towards those who were walking around him, the judgmental attitude he had. He is free from all that. He has been forgiven and now he walks.

What does he do with the mat? What would you do with the mat? There is a perpetual bon fire going on in the southern valley of Jerusalem in this crevice and they are always burning trash there. It is called the Valley of Gehenna. I wonder if he just got up and said – I am going there and I am burning this thing that I have been lying on for my whole life. I cannot wait to see this thing blow up into flames. He could do that.

Or, I wonder if he took it home and put it on the wall so that right when you enter his house, it was held up by the four holes where those ropes went through on the mat where those four friends lowered him into the presence of Jesus the Christ because he would have you over and you would say – What's with the mat? – Others might say – Don't ask about the mat. We have all heard this story. – I haven't heard the story. Okay, here we go. And he would tell the story of who his friends are and how Jesus healed him and he would say this – I am who I befriended. That is who I am.

I would like to just show you what kind of friends I have. If you don't mind, I would like to do a little tap dance for you. I am just showing off.

You are who you befriend.

You choose who your friends will be; they choose who you will be. Choose carefully.

How do you become a friend?

Today, I wanted to convince you of the importance of friendship – how it can alter a man's life, how it could alter a country, how it could alter the history of the western world by a king's speech because someone said – I will be your friend if you give me your total trust. I will tell you what to believe and I will tell you how to behave and we can give this world hope against all odds.

I hope it has been convincing but I didn't just want you to believe that. I wanted to change your behavior. I wanted to so inflict upon you the importance of friendship that you would change your priorities, that you would arrange your life differently.

Your plates are full; I am sure they are. So the only way you can add something is to take something off. That is what I am trying to motivate you to do. I want you to say: *Enough. I have 10,000 acquaintances. I have 5 people who know me. But I don't have any friends and I don't know how to be a friend. I am too scared.*

Today, I am asking you to take the next step. What is your next step? I am asking you to do that next thing.

At Grace, we are committed to relationships. We believe in the community here. We have structured the whole church so that maybe you could find a friend in that context of what we do here. So we have Adult Communities, Sunday School classes. You can go to one of those. My point is, could you come to church for two hours instead of the one service – because you want to make a friend? Through those adult communities, that is how you find what we call Life Groups here – small groups – a band of four guys who can lower you through a roof. That is how it happens. There are other ways but that is the structure of things here.

Interestingly, we did a survey a few months ago to see the health of the church. It wasn't a surprise but it was profound nonetheless about how the most spiritually vital people in this congregation are the ones who come to church, Big Church, and then they go to an adult community – because they make friends there. But the people who took it one step more and were in Life Groups, those were the people that responded in ways that showed a tenderness towards God's Word, that had active prayer lives, that believed deeply and behaved righteously.

So, here is the punch. It is not whether you are convinced of the value of friendships. It is whether you are altering your life for them. That is what I am appealing to. Would you change your priorities and set apart time to come to an adult community, to go into one of those communities and say – Who is the guy, gal, couple in charge of finding a place where I can find someone that I can hold their rope and change their world? – That is the appeal.

Albert Schweitzer said, "We are all so much together, but we are all dying of loneliness."

Mother Teresa, another deep thinker said, "Loneliness is the leprosy of modern society. And no one wants anybody to know they're a leper."

There is a cure for leprosy. At this church, it is through finding community in relationships.

Would you consider doing that?

Let's pray to that end.

Lord,

I know I can speak for a lot of people that they are just busy but they are lonely. If they stop and there is no noise, they just feel the weight of that. Lord, I ask that today maybe they would ask your Spirit to give them the courage to take the next step. Maybe courage is just admitting that they have some things to change so that they can be a better friend. So be it.

Lord, sometimes it is just scheduling. Lord, I ask that you give them wisdom on what to drop so they can add this to their priorities.

Lord, I ask that You help our church be a church that is really committed to relationships and these relationships in these communities and that these communities are life giving and life altering. Give us a knowledge of this power that we would be roof crashers for other people, that we would speak this truth into people's lives and that we would receive the truth and believe it to be true.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen