

The Gospel Of Luke

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’²⁰

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ (Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)

Message 7

Sinners To Repentance

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Luke 5:27-32

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Luke 5:27-32. This is a great passage. Let’s read it together and then I’ll provide some drive by introduction as we make our way towards the heart of the matter.

27 After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’²⁸ And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

29 Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax-collectors and others sitting at the table with them.³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?’³¹ Jesus answered, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick;³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.’ (Luke 5:27-32. NRSV)

First of all notice again the distinctive response of the true disciple:

And he got up, **left everything, and followed** him. (NRSVB)

It doesn’t say that he shed a tear, raised his hand, prayed the sinners’ prayer or felt warmly towards the Lord Jesus. It said that he LEFT IT ALL and FOLLOWED. That is not easy-

beliefism that is saving faith. That is CHARACTERISTIC of real believers; that is how it was with Peter, James and John too:

¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, **they left everything and followed** him. (Luke 5:11. NRSV)

Many of us have heard sermons on the fishermen who left it all, abandoning their nets to follow Jesus but Matthew's faith is far more impressive. If the Jesus thing hadn't worked out for Peter, James and John they could easily go back to their nets, as indeed we find them doing when all appeared lost after the crucifixion; John's Gospel records that story:

³Simon Peter said to them, **'I am going fishing.'** They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. (John 21:3-4. NRSV)

Jesus had to RE-CALL them because it was so easy for them to fall back into their old lives. Not so for Matthew. Matthew was a TAX COLLECTOR. He collected custom and duty on goods moving along Roman roads, you did not simply walk away from a Roman tax office and think that they would take you back. Matthew not only lost his job PERMANENTLY, he was also probably a wanted man. It would probably have been worth his life to try and get his old job back. Matthew was almost certainly the richest of the disciples and yet he threw it all away. But, and this is so instructive, he isn't moping or counting the cost. He considers it a great joy to have been given this opportunity and the Bible says:

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house (NRSV)

He didn't lean over to Jesus and say: 'I hope you realise how much following you is costing me', no, he throws Jesus a HUGE THANK YOU party and he invites all of his friends and associates to come and share his joy. We need to hear that church! I need to hear that. We sometimes put our tithe in the plate and we look longingly at it as it sits there. 'There's a corvette car payment in there just sitting there waiting to be picked up. It's a red corvette, maybe with leather seats. I like the smell of leather.' And we just stare at it COUNTING THE COST. I am guilty of this! I repent of this! Lord, how immeasurable and how vast is the sum of blessings that we have been given in Jesus Christ! We repent for having mourned the cost of following. We are rich in

Christ, we are joint heirs to all things because of his blood and his mercy. Oh that there were more Matthew's in the household of faith. We're not preaching on that though, with verses 30-32 we reach the heart of the matter:

³⁰The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' ³¹Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; ³²**I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.**' (NRSV)

That's a powerful statement isn't it? That is an incredibly significant statement and it needs to be unpacked because it tends to give rise to three very important questions that we need to take a careful look at. Let's do that before dealing with some basic implications of this teaching.

Question 1: Is there room for sinners in the church?

At first glance this question appears to be too easy and too obvious, but reading the rest of the Bible helps to show why this question is relevant. For example, the Bible says:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. ²And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that **he who has done this would have been removed from among you?** (1 Corinthians 5:1-2. NRSV)

Obviously in the early church it was taught that certain sinners were not welcome in the church. This man, who was having sexual relations with his step mother was to be removed and we know that he was removed. There are many other passages that seem to complicate things. Galatians 5 says:

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: **those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** (Galatians 5:19-21. NRSV)

So the Bible seems to say that all of these promises we gather to celebrate cannot be claimed by those doing any of the sins mentioned above. However, the Bible also talks about the obvious presence of sinners in the church – and by that term I mean unsaved people who are living in some state of unforgiven sins. Every Christian is a sinner SAVED BY GRACE, but in the Bible, once you are saved by grace you tend to be referred to as a 'saint' not as a sinner, so when I say 'sinner' I mean a sinner not yet saved by grace or a sinner persisting or moving deeper into sin.

The gathered church seems to have been a mixture of saint and sinner since the earliest days. 1 Corinthians says:

¹⁵What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in **the position of an outsider** say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up. ¹⁸I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; ¹⁹nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:15-19. NRSV)

I told you last week, or the week before that the Greek word translated as 'outsider' is the word *id-ee-o-tace* and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out which English word is derived from that. The word meant 'ignorant outsider' which isn't very nice, but it does helpfully inform us that there were ignorant outsiders at church meetings even in the Apostle Paul's day. The whole chapter is basically a set of guidelines to make sure that church worship happened in a way that reflected awareness that unbelievers were present. It did not suggest catering to them, it suggested ways of doing worship that would maximize the conversion of these people. For example Paul says:

²³If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, **and outsiders or unbelievers enter**, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. ²⁵After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you.' (1 Corinthians 14:23-25. NRSV)

The emphasis in church services should be on truth speech that is intelligible so that sinners realise their sinfulness and REPENT and become worshippers of the living and true God. The answer to this question then is yes – yes there is room in the church for sinners, but it is a complicated yes. That takes us to our next question.

Question 2: What kind of sinners are welcome in the church?

Let's look first at one passage we've already used, the 1 Corinthians 5 passage. The Apostle goes on to say:

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons— ¹⁰not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. ¹¹But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister* who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. ¹²For what have I to do with

judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? ¹³God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you.' (NRSV)

This passage makes it clear that there is a type of sinner that is not welcome in the church and we might call it the 'Christian' sinner. By this we mean the person who SAYS they are a Christian but shows no interest in moral obedience to the way of Christ. They confess with their mouth but reveal their deceitfulness through disobedience. About these people Jesus said:

²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who practice lawlessness!**' (Matthew 7:22-23. NKJV)

The church is called on to be quite vigilant in rooting out any who CALL themselves Christians but who act in a lawless or immoral fashion because they do serious damage to the name and reputation of Christ. Anyone who has ever done any witnessing whatsoever knows the truth of this. When I share the Gospel with people the biggest barriers I face are experiences that the person has had with people who ought to have been kicked out of the church. They will say: 'My neighbour was a member of that there Baptist church and he used to beat me to the strip club every Friday night. All you Christians are hypocritical perverts.' That Baptist church, who thought they were being so merciful just condemned a man to hell. He won't become a Christian now because the Baptist church wouldn't practice church discipline against his neighbour. If you don't think I'm being realistic, than you've never tried to share your faith. The greatest ally Satan has is 'GRACIOUS' churches who refuse to discipline so called believers. People who call themselves Christians but who practice sin are not welcome in this church because you are ruining the name of Jesus in this city.

Let's look at one more passage to help us nail this down:

¹⁰ **After a first and second admonition**, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, ¹¹since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned. (Titus 3:10-11. NRSV)

Here we see what type of sinner is being targeted: the persistent and rebellious. The Bible doesn't say: 'If a so-called Christian makes a mistake kick them out'. It says: 'If a person rejects correction and continues on a destructive course, kick them out.' That's an important distinction that leaves us ready to give an answer to our question. What types of sinners are welcome in the

church? All sinners **except those who call themselves Christians and who reject correction and who persist in known sin.** Does that make sense?

Question 3: What style of evangelism does this story commend?

This story is often used to instruct disciples in a manner of evangelism, and so it should be. The question is what style of evangelism is this story commending; because often it is recruited to defend all sorts of approaches that were foreign to Jesus.

Let's start with what this story is not saying. It is not saying that unthinking, perpetual association (just hanging around with sinners) is a useful style of evangelism. People will often recruit this story to such ridiculous and unbiblical approaches. They will say: 'I go to the bar every Friday night because Jesus came to seek out sinners not the righteous'. Of course they always leave out the end of that verse: 'TO REPENTANCE' but that's not my point yet. My point for now is whether Jesus having dinner at Matthew's house is permission for you and I to do evangelism at the bar or the strip club. Well let's look at this. First of all, the dinner was not at the local bar, it was not at the Guild Hall of the Tax Collector's Union, it was at Matthew's house. The dinner was at the home of a disciple. That in itself is significant. People will often say things about Jesus that are simply not true. They will say that Jesus went to where sinners were found, he went to them, rather than waiting for them to come to him. Strictly speaking, that isn't true. Look at what is going on in this story. Jesus is having dinner at a DISCIPLE's home. We know that he is a real disciple because the Bible says:

²⁸And he got up, left everything, and followed him. (Luke 5:28. NRSV)

Matthew was no wishy washy seeker, he was the real deal. Then Matthew invites all of his friends to come and meet Jesus. They come to meet him. Ask yourself a hard Biblical question: where did Jesus do most of his teaching? What does the Bible say? Let me show you:

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, **he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom.** He stood up to read... (Luke 4:16ff. NRSV)

A lot of his teaching happened in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Also Luke says of Jesus:

⁴⁷ And He was **teaching daily in the temple**. (Luke 19:47. NKJV)

Jesus says of himself when the Jewish authorities sought his arrest:

Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. (Matthew 26:55. NRSV)

So let's dispel an urban myth: Jesus did not teach in bars or whorehouses, he taught in the synagogue and in the temple and sometimes in open air meetings. That's what the Bible says, regardless of what other Christians may have told you. Where in the Bible does it say that Jesus went somewhere he shouldn't in order to reach sinners? Nowhere. All of the major 'sinner stories' that we love to use to make this claim reveal it as a lie. What about the woman caught in adultery, you ask. Well let's look:

²Early in the morning **he came again to the temple**. All the **people came to him** and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The scribes and **the Pharisees brought a woman** who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. (John 8:2-4. NRSV)

Jesus was not in a brothel when this story took place, he was where he usually was: in the temple teaching. She came to him, and not of her own will. We usually forget how this story ends as well:

go, and sin no more (John 8:11. KJV)

This story and indeed the Bible itself does not advocate for a reckless and unthinking association based model of evangelism. It doesn't say that we should sit in bars, get jobs in Hollywood or try to reform the modelling and advertising agencies. It just doesn't. In fact the Bible says:

For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? ¹⁵What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15. NRSV)

³³Do not be deceived:

'Bad company ruins good morals.'

³⁴Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:33-34. NRSV)

So let's be sober and undecieved: The truth is, Jesus was accessible and gracious towards sinners, but by and large, they were drawn to him and he never compromised in order to reach them.

So what style of evangelism does this passage and others like it commend? There is another story in Luke's Gospel that seems to press for the same approach, we find it if we skip ahead three chapters. It's the story of the man from whom a legion of demons was exorcised. When the man had returned to his right mind he asked if he could travel about with Jesus. Luke tells us:

³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying,
³⁹**Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.** So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:38-39. NRSV)

The model of evangelism that Luke believed that Jesus taught becomes clear by comparing these two stories. Jesus taught that people should evangelise those among whom they lived before getting saved. If you were a tax collector, you should try first to reach tax collectors. Return home first and declare how much God has done for you. The Bible doesn't say to charge the brothels and bars, it says to reach those closest to you. To try and make the Bible say more than that is deceitful and dangerous.

Transition:

Now that we understand what this passage is and is not saying, we need to deal with the implications.

What Are The Implications Of This Teaching For The Church?

1. We need to call sinners

The church cannot become a country club for the saved. It just can't. The church is a weird place because there is a sense in which we exist for the people who aren't here yet. That's odd. It's odd and it's easy to forget. That's why our first Core Value here at this church reminds us of that:

We deeply believe that lost people matter to God, and therefore, ought to matter to our church.

Real quick in shopping list fashion there are few principles that we will need to live by if we are to be effective at calling sinners:

i. Proximity

This one sounds really obvious but it is amazing how quickly churches forget this. As soon as most churches start being successful and taking in more money than they are spending they tend to start dreaming of relocating further away from sinners. Every sprawling suburban big box church started out in the inner city but then moved away as soon as they had money to do so. A lot of sinners are poor, because sin steals life and blessing from people, and a lot of poor people don't drive so as soon as you move away you've made a decision to distance yourself from sinners. Don't do it.

More than just physical proximity there also has to be cultural proximity. This is the really tough one. Listen to me, there are some barriers to becoming a Christian that we can't lower. Jesus says 'no sex outside of marriage'. He says 'no drugs', he says 'no lying', he says 'pay your taxes'. Just those four barriers will keep most of the people in the world from becoming Christians. We can't touch those barriers. But we can lower the ones we invented. Lots of people don't come to church because they don't own nice clothes. We can change that. You will notice that I have been slowly lowering the bar on platform attire over the last four years. When we started I wore a jacket and tie. After a year the jacket went away and it was just the tie. After a year of that we lost the tie. Now we've had a year of just a dress shirt and dress pants. Guess what year four will bring: dress jeans. Ooooooh! Scary eh? Some of you are going to need therapy on that day but the truth is that is a barrier we can lower. Jesus will not reject us for wearing dress jeans on the stage and if that helps one poor person feel more at home in this church than it was probably a sin to wait four years to do it. We cannot be the high and mighty rich people on the hill if we are to reach the poor and the lost of Orillia. I'm not trying to be respectable, I'm trying to be effective. The Apostle Paul said:

I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:22-23. NRSV)

I know that no one need go to hell because I stop wearing dress pants. I also know that some have gone to hell because they thought they needed them to come to this church. That's a proximity issue that will now change.

ii. Priority

Real quickly now, in addition to proximity, to be effective at calling sinners it has to be a priority. We've dedicated a lot of resources to reaching outsiders with the Gospel over the last few years and there is no other way to do it. It's expensive, staff intensive and it can be hard on the building. You can tell how highly calling sinners is prioritised in a church by how loudly members complain when things get broken or stolen. Reaching the lost is expensive and it will demand the lion's share of our budget and time.

iii. Patience

And thirdly it will require patience. When you reach truly lost people they are starting from scratch and have to be taught everything from the ground up. This takes time and patience. There will be ups and downs, backs and forths, victories and sorrows. Be patient, stick with it.

2. We need to call sinners TO REPENTANCE

This is where I break with the whole seeker thing. The seeker thing says that we just try and keep sinners coming back, Sunday after Sunday and eventually, by some force of gravity they will give up their sinful ways and become Christians, one slow step at a time. In reality this never happens and Christians die a slow and painful death of compromise while they wait for it. But I don't reject it just because it doesn't work, I reject it because its unbiblical. Jesus associated with sinners, absolutely, but look at what he said to them while they were hanging out:

To the woman caught in adultery, a pretty good sinner that one, he said:

go, and sin no more (John 8:11. KJV)

To the five time divorced fornicating unmarried Samaritan woman he said:

‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ (John 5:16. NRSV)

That’s a little direct isn’t it? Jesus called a spade a spade friends. He taught to sinners and he taught about sinners saying:

‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?
³No, I tell you; but **unless you repent, you will all perish** as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?
⁵No, I tell you; but **unless you repent, you will all perish** just as they did.’ (Luke 13:2-5. NRSV)

The sermon content of Gentle Jesus Meek And Mild, Friend of Sinners and Seeker of the Lost was an unapologetic: ‘Repent or you’re going to hell’. There’s your seeker sensitive sermon right there.

My friends this ridiculous notion that Jesus accepted people just as they are is pure heresy. He accepted them yes, but not as they are, he demanded that they REPENT. That they die to their old destructive ways, take up their cross and FOLLOW HIM. That’s the opposite of accepting people just as they are. When you tell people that everything about them needs to be crucified and that they need to repent and completely change their ways or you will cast them into hell you are not accepting people just as they are. Jesus told a story about a guy who thought he could get into heaven ‘just as he was’ and it ended really bad. He said:

¹¹ ‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.’ (Matthew 22:11-14. NRSV)

They weren’t singing ‘Just As I Am’ as they threw this man into hell I can promise you that.

Many are called – all of you who came out to church today are here because the Holy Spirit put a call on your heart to come. I pray for some of you, by name, that God would do that very thing, that he would wake you up and put a call on your heart to come to the house of the Lord today. But if the Lord returned today many that were called would not be chosen because you decided to come to church today ‘Just As You Are’. You will be bound hand and foot and thrown into the

outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Weeping and gnashing of teeth are symbols in the Bible of bitter regret. It is people who thought they were in, who thought they had it figured out who react in such ways. People who rejected Jesus on purpose will at least know that they are getting what they chose for themselves, but woe to the one who thought he would receive heaven and instead is given hell. That one will be filled with unspeakable anguish and regret. Let it not be so for you.

I know I'm supposed to be talking about the implications of this for us as a church but I can't do that – we ought to know anyway. If we fail at this than we are no church. We were told to take the Gospel to the unsaved and if we fail to do so we are worse off than those who never heard the name of Jesus. You can add that up for yourself and figure out what we are going to do. But if you came here today thinking that you can just sit with saints and be counted as one, or that you can call yourself a Christian and live however you like or if you thought that gentle Jesus would just accept you no matter how you really are, than you need to come to the altar and REPENT and get right with the Lord. It's not my job to force you or cajole you, it's just my job to tell you the truth. There it is. As the worship team comes to lead us in praise and thanksgiving I'm going to ask Susan and Mike and a few elder couples to head into the side chamber and any who need to can join them there for prayer and repentance. Stand with me as we prepare to worship and I'm going to ask you to sing with your eyes closed if you are able to keep the barriers as low as they can be for those who are drawing near to Jesus this morning. Let's worship now.