

**‘Who do you think you're talking to?’**

Luke 5: 17-26

When I was a wee boy (wee in Scotland means small, or young!) we lived in a house with what seemed like endless attic space:

- a door in every upstairs room opened onto a warren of passages which twisted and turned their way to every part of the roof space!

It was the perfect place to store all the junk *and all the stuff* that didn't have a place anywhere else in the house:

- this little *labyrinth* was also an excellent place from which to play tricks on unsuspecting guests — creeping through and *bursting* into their bedroom in the middle of the night;
- and it was the perfect *retreat* when you were in a bad mood — not that I ever went into a bad mood, you understand! /

My awful sense of direction meant that as I weaved my way through these passages, I never quite knew where I was:

- I suspect that may well have been the case for the man who arrived to adjust our television aerial, the cable for which snaked into the loft space;
- he crashed right through our kitchen ceiling one evening as my mother cooked the evening meal;
- OK it was only his foot – *and a little bit of his leg* – but it gave her a real fright all the same...

For a long time afterwards she kept one eye on the cooker and one eye on the ceiling when dinner time came along! //

I'm always reminded of this unanticipated entrance when I hear of the paralyzed man being lowered through the roof by his pals — the second story in our 6 week series *‘Sharing Faith the Jesus Way!’* /

Over these weeks, we're thinking about how Jesus reached out to people and how that might help us do the same today - now, *in our time!* //

Last week we heard about the story of the woman at the well... and we considered how Jesus meets people on their terms - whether that's on the road, in their home, at the synagogue, in a boat, up a mountain, at the dinner table – *even crashing through a ceiling...*

We were also reminded that we don't have to be perfect to share our faith...

Perhaps today's tale offers us a further insight into just how we can *Share our Faith the Jesus' Way!* //

The story is set in Peter's house at Capernaum – headquarters of Jesus' ministry! /

Those of you who have visited Capernaum and the site of what is historically believed to be Peter's home will know it's not huge:

- it wouldn't take much to fill it with people and for the crowd to spill outside! /

Jesus - *remember* - is growing in popularity and reputation so I expect the house that day is packed to the gunnels with people pushing and jostling for pole position...

Picture, if you will, the scene:

- the friends of the sick man know this could be their only chance to help him;

Jesus could move on any minute, he could lie low;

- if they're going to make a move - it has to be now. *And it has to be by any means possible!*  
//

Houses in Jesus' day were flat-roofed for extra living space – a bit like having a decking area or patio on your roof. And there was usually a staircase at the side of the house giving access...

These men struggle with their sick friend onto the roof and begin prying up tiles, mud and wattle until they can see light below...

And below – **inside the house:**

- people hanging on every word from the mouth of Jesus;
- *when suddenly* -- pieces of dried mud begin falling on those standing under the widening hole;
- Peter looks up to see his roof being systematically dismantled;
- *And Jesus?* Well... Jesus takes it all in his stride! //

While those around might well feel **indignant** at the interruption – *the audacity of those ripping the roof to pieces* - and the blatant queue jumping:

- Jesus accepts the interruption — as if people crash through roofs every day...

**And he does three things:**

- **First of all**, he acknowledges the efforts of the friends who bring the man to him. When he saw *their* faith — we're told — he offers forgiveness of sins... /

**Secondly**, he discerns the *real* need in this situation:

- it's not clever teaching or crowd pleasing;
- it's not reacting to the criticism and challenge of the scribes and the Pharisees...

**The real need** is embodied in the paralysed man before him — *nothing else matters at that moment!!!* /

**Thirdly**, he enters into a conversation with those around him and suddenly this unexpected — *and even comical* — interruption becomes the focus of some deep and probing questions:

- questions that invite everyone – not just the paralysed man - to be forgiven and healed! //

*'Who do you think you're talking to, Jesus'*, might be the reaction of the crowd — shocked at his concern for a sick man laid low — *they believe* — by sin;

*'Who do you think you're talking to, Jesus'*, is certainly the reaction of the scribes and the Pharisees — indignant at his challenging of the law and his throwing out forgiveness in the name of God;

*'Who do you think you're talking to, Jesus'*, might be the question *we fear* when called to share our faith in a not always welcoming world! //

I'm reminded of the story of the rather arrogant pastor visiting a nursing home...

Having been ignored by the busy staff for a little longer than he feels is appropriate to his standing, he confronts a nurse who with a wave of her hand asks him to wait a little longer: *"Do you know who you're talking to?"* he says...

She places a comforting arm around his shoulders and says gently: *"No, dear, but go and ask matron and I'm sure she'll tell you."* /

Like Jesus, *we must meet people where they are* and as **who** they are — without judgement - *without condemnation* - and without spiritual arrogance...

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: “*Jesus himself did not try to convert the two thieves on the cross; he waited until one of them turned to him.*” //

The story of the paralysed man reminds us that our faith – *weak or strong* – is **enough**:

- it’s enough to carry folk to Christ not physically but spiritually – through prayer, *through understanding*, through identification, *through love*...

It demonstrates that while the task is never an easy one — those first steps are all that matters, **for Jesus will do the rest!** /

And it reveals the importance not of **conversion** but of **conversation** – and not necessarily with words:

- we’re not — *all of us* — articulate or confident when speaking about our faith;
- instead it reveals the power of a *conversation of care*. We can — *all of us* — speak through our actions! //

In early 2016 I had the privilege one morning of welcoming the first group of Syrian refugees to Clydebank — a large town with lots of social deprivation, not too far from Helensburgh:

- you’ll find Clydebank in the history books – it was bombed by the German Luftwaffe during World War Two in what has become known as the ‘Clydebank Blitz’. /

Around 30 families arrived at a Church of Scotland hall where they each received clothes — *lots of toys for the children* — and some practical help about starting a new life in a town — **maybe even a country** — many of them had never heard of:

- we gave out tea, coffee, juice and biscuits, and did our best to communicate;
- **and I think we did quite well** considering they spoke no English, and we no Arabic — a smile and a hot drink is the same in any language! /

Their interpreters shared with us some of the terrible experiences these families had undergone before finally arriving in Scotland – fathers killed — sons imprisoned — children traumatised, homes reduced to rubble:

- all they owned was literally what they stood up in — the clothes on their back;
- they had lost homes, jobs, friends, stability, familiarity and hope! /

I'll never forget the look on their faces when through their interpreters we invited them – *all of them Muslims* – to use our church for prayer:

- opening a door for them to the sanctuary wasn't quite the same clawing a hole in the roof of an unsuspecting crowd below...

But given what those people had endured — **it may have seemed that way to them:**

- we didn't understand what they were saying;
- we couldn't come close to comprehending what they had gone through;
- but the church community – *in that moment* - recognised their need – *physical and spiritual* – and responded to the faith those refugees they put in us.... //

A few weeks later I could not help smiling when one of the refugees was interviewed on the evening news about how he and his fellow Syrians were settling in to their new lives in Scotland...

Through an interpreter, he said...

*"This place..... is for us Paradise"*. Now, I've heard Clydebank described as lots of things. Until that day I don't think 'paradise' was ever one of them...

That small gesture — *from the Church community* — allowed them to stand a little taller, and walk their way to the future a little more reassured! //

The prospect of being an evangelist – *of reaching out to people* - can be a scary one...

We're none of us a Billy Graham — able to preach powerfully and convert thousands to Christ in an evening!....

***But remember: God isn't asking us to do that:***

- evangelism doesn't have to be about counting the number of scalps or target groups ready for conversion;
- our task is not about coercion — *manipulation* — or pressure! //

**The reality is:**

- we are the ones *desperate* for healing for the world;
- we are the ones struggling with the burdens of the world and anxious for Christ to hear us;

- we are the ones summoned to get our hands dirty in the struggle for the hurts of the world to be recognised;
- we are the ones whose faith *matters* in the restoration of the world! //

**In all this:**

- *who do we think we're talking to?* /

We're talking to human beings made and loved by God for whom Christ died! //

*Sharing faith the Jesus way* means focusing on the people and the issues that matter here and now — knowing *Christ* will not lie low or move on! //

As we navigate the passageways of life — may we welcome the Spirit's interruption and follow it where it leads, with all its highs and lows! /

Something to think about!

**AMEN**