

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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Carrie Gleeson
Wired for Service
Luke 5:17-26**

Good morning everyone! How are we doing this morning? I love the line in that video, [video shown just before start of sermon] “Let’s just not drift this summer.” So often that’s what summer—especially in Minnesota—is about. We’re just going to cut loose, we’re not in school anymore, we can go to the cabin, we’ll be on the water, we’re just going to drift. And so often when we get to do that, it means that we drift spiritually too. And I love that we don’t want to just drift. Let’s challenge each other this summer not to drift, but instead to figure out how we are wired naturally and where we need to become more wired so that we can connect with God. Let’s pray as we jump into scripture this morning.

God, I pray that You would speak to us this morning. I know that You have a message that is unique for every single one of us, and I pray Father, that we would listen to You. That we would be open to hearing from You. I pray Lord, that You would use scripture to speak loudly to us, to challenge us, to convict us, to encourage us. God, we are here and we are ready to hear from You. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Did you know that our brains have the ability to store, in our long-term memory, certain actions that are repeated regularly? It’s called muscle memory. And according to Men’s Health Magazine, muscle memory is when our brain encodes information and records whether certain movements were right or wrong, and then gradually focuses more energy on the correct action and stores it in our long-term memory. Once it has been stored, then you need to use less brain power or less brain activity because the action starts to feel more natural. We develop these highway systems in our brain that help us remember things, help us remember ways of doing things, so that they become automatic. Some people have a muscle memory for playing instruments. Sara can probably sit at that piano with her eyes closed and play something beautiful because her fingers remember where the keys are and which one needs to come next. Some people have it just automatic in their brains how to swing a golf club. My brain is still working on that one, but it’s getting there! We have muscle memory for driving. I was recently in the U.K. and got an opportunity to drive—which was pretty scary—but every time I went to put the car into gear, I did this [makes shifting motion with her right hand] and if you have ever driven in the U.K. you know that is not the action you should do. It needs to go here [makes shifting motion with her left hand]. So it threw my memory and my actions completely off, that I was driving on the opposite side of the car on the opposite side of the road. We hear phrases like, “It’s just like riding a bike”, which infers

that we will be able to naturally remember how to do something because it's stored in our muscle memory. And while muscle memory helps us to play the piano or swing the golf club or drive a car, we cannot only rely on that muscle memory, because if we are not intentional, we could get tripped up. And I think those same principles apply to our spiritual lives. Sometimes we get too comfortable with the muscle memory that we have created spiritually. Some of us have figured out completely how we are wired. We know exactly what connects us to God, and so we stick with that, and for some we feel as invigorated today as we did thirty years ago when we started that spiritual pathway or that spiritual practice. But for some of us, I think it becomes just going through the motions, this feeling and thought that it's so automatic that I don't have to think about it anymore, and it creates a barrier to connecting with God, because spiritual life in this world will not happen by accident. Following Jesus has to be intentional and focused. We cannot solely and only rely on muscle memory. Our muscles need flexing whether we feel wired to do something or not.

Last week Steve Wiens talked about the wiring of worship, that some of us are just wired to naturally come into this space and feel completely connected to God. We love worshipping God through music, we love listening to sermons; that is how we are naturally wired. And Steve concluded by saying that when we leave church, we are sent out to be the body of Christ to the world; that we participate in the movement of worship in order to live a life of worship out there. We are not created to just stay in this space for each other. We get to participate with God out in the world.

This morning we are specifically going to look at what that looks like through service. Service can be many things, but I think sometimes we pigeonhole it into only being building a house, or serving at a soup kitchen. And while those are acts of service, I think when we summarize it that narrowly we minimize the work of God and the opportunities that God places in our paths every day. Service is about identifying opportunities and partnering with God to meet the needs of His people and then bringing His kingdom to earth. Adele Calhoun says that service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence, and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others. That covers a lot of stuff. It is building houses, it is standing up to injustice, it is caring for your neighbor, it's embracing a new student at camp. Bob Geoff is one of my favorite Christian authors and speakers. He says that Christians are called to love God, love people, and do stuff. At the heart of service is a love for Jesus Christ our savior, and out of that flows this willingness and this desire to serve people. And when we are committed to a life of faith, committed to caring about the things that Jesus cares about, we get to care about people because Jesus cares about people.

So the narrative we are going to look at today is about a group of friends who did stuff. They used their resources, their time, their influence, and their expertise to care for one of their friends in the best way they knew. They didn't just think about serving their friend, they didn't just talk about serving their friend, they didn't say *we're going to wait until soccer is over*, or *maybe when we get back from camp*, or *maybe after the cabin*

weekend—they served in the opportunity that was presented to them in that moment. They knew they needed to get their friend right to the feet of Jesus, and so they did that. So if you want to turn in your pew Bibles, and it will also be up on the screens, we are going to Luke 5:17-26:

¹⁷ One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and religion teachers were sitting around. They had come from nearly every village in Galilee and Judea, even as far away as Jerusalem, to be there. The healing power of God was on him.
¹⁸⁻²⁰ Some men arrived carrying a paraplegic on a stretcher. They were looking for a way to get into the house and set him before Jesus. When they couldn't find a way in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, removed some tiles, and let him down in the middle of everyone, right in front of Jesus. Impressed by their bold belief, he said, "Friend, I forgive your sins."²¹ That set the religion scholars and Pharisees buzzing. "Who does he think he is? That's blasphemous talk! God and only God can forgive sins."²²⁻²⁶ Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking and said, "Why all this gossipy whispering? Which is simpler: to say 'I forgive your sins,' or to say 'Get up and start walking'? Well, just so it's clear that I'm the Son of Man and authorized to do either, or both. . . ." He now spoke directly to the paraplegic: "Get up. Take your bedroll and go home." Without a moment's hesitation, he did it—got up, took his blanket, and left for home, giving glory to God all the way. The people rubbed their eyes, incredulous—and then also gave glory to God. Awestruck, they said, "We've never seen anything like that!" [Luke 5:17-26 (MSG)]

It's the determination of these friends that is incredible in this story. They would not be turned away; they were getting their friend into the presence of Jesus. And can you imagine the conversation as they approached the house and saw that it was packed. One of them turns to the other and says *it's too full. What do we do?* And then another one says *well, what about the roof? We could go up on the roof.* If I was standing there, I'd be like *what are we going to do on the roof? That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard.* But they wouldn't have it; they were getting their friend to Jesus. So they climbed up the outside stairs of the house, carrying their friend on his mat. With the hot sun beating down on their heads, they got on the roof, identified where they thought Jesus must have been, and started digging. And what would you have thought if you were sitting in that room listening to Jesus, as you looked up and began seeing a hole in the roof, and people's hands digging out the dirt and the clay that held that roof together. Well, if you are anything like me, which I blame on being an oldest child, you would have been like *excuse me—we're in the middle of something here, and I'd like order here, and shhhh.* Because it was an interruption to Jesus' teaching, and there were all these people—Pharisees and religious teachers and other people—who had gotten there early to get a good seat so that they could hear Jesus' teaching. But I don't think Jesus would have thought of it as an interruption at all. In fact, I think that as He looked up to them...Ken Gire said that He saw four sweaty men, willing to put a shoulder to their faith, with scraped hands, willing to burrow through any obstacles, dirty faces hungering for a miracle, breathless with excitement, wide-eyed with anticipation. They were famished

for a sweet taste of heaven. Their act of service came out of their belief in the power of God...in their surrender to His ability to move. They loved their friend so they did the best thing they knew how to do: get him to Jesus.

That's the opportunity we have in serving others. We are invited to participate in the kingdom of God through activism and service in order to bring people to Jesus. To show them the love of a savior who rescues us, who redeems any situation or circumstance. That's what those friends did in that moment. And as I was sitting with this passage this week, there was one question that kept coming to mind: Would I even know that my friend needed Jesus? Would I even notice that my friend couldn't walk? Or, am I too busy? Do I keep my head down and my eyes averted to the opportunities that God places in front of me?

As you look back over this text, there are two groups of people identified: the friends we talked about, and the Pharisees. The Pharisees must have been appalled at what was going on. They were those people grumbling in the meeting because they had come to hear Jesus. They didn't understand. They didn't make room for this man to get into the house. They didn't notice him; they were concerned with their world and their agendas. And I hate to admit it, but I catch myself acting and thinking like a Pharisee more than I would like to admit. I resemble someone who spends too much time thinking about my agenda, my universe, and I miss out on so much more that God has for me. I stumble and look at those who are passionate about a cause with judgment. Or, I start to be someone who compares what I'm passionate about with what they are passionate about and think *well, mine is more important*. Or I become someone who speaks before listening. I become someone who grumbles and complains about things going on at church. I become someone who doesn't want to sit and listen to someone who is different than me. I am someone who turns a blind eye to the acts of service that God puts right in front of me, and it's really convicting to sit in this passage.

Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence, and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others. I have some friends who truly live this out. This is how they are wired naturally, and so they choose to serve in amazing ways. Their love of Jesus compels them to act. I think of my friend Melissa, who leads a Bible study with a group of women from Bible Study Fellowship most every week during the school year at the Shakopee Women's Prison. They want to bring people to Jesus by telling these women, who probably feel like the world has turned against them because of their past mistakes—and in that, maybe their God has turned against them because of their past mistakes—that this is not true. They bring the message of Jesus to women who need to know that they belong and that they are loved. They start digging that hole in the roof. Or some of my friends who just graduated from high school this year—they spent their last week of school in Haiti serving with Healing Haiti. They were the hands and feet of Jesus to children living in extreme poverty, to children with special needs, and to adults who have been affected by some of the most devastating natural disasters in a country that is just torn up by corruption and economic depression. They were

lowering their friends to the floor to be with Jesus. Or my friend David, who was sitting at a picnic table recently and could not escape the nudging of the Lord to ask the man sitting next to him how he was doing that day. David learned that the man had lost his wife recently, and felt abandoned by the church in the midst of his grief. What if David had just kept his head down? Kept working on what he wanted to work on that day? Avoided eye contact? I could tell you so many stories of people who live out this wiring of service. Barb and Sharon who are giddy about the Bible study they help to facilitate at Vernon Terrace. Ellis who shows up almost every single time his high school small group of boys has a hockey game or a baseball game. Todd who works vigorously to help people understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Laura who fights for women who are in human trafficking. There are countless stories of people in this community or connected to this community who are wired to serve, and as someone who hides behind the excuse that service is just not how I'm naturally wired, as someone who stands behind busyness or fear—the fear of not knowing what to say when you want to get involved with a situation or a circumstance or a platform that is just so big—I have to ask myself how God might be challenging me to build spiritual muscles in this area because muscle memory can be changed and altered. And if I want to be about loving God, loving people, and doing stuff, I may need to develop new muscles.

Maybe this is exactly how you are wired and that is so good. I would challenge you to figure out ways in which God might be developing you to be even stronger in this area. And I would challenge you to make sure that you know what your motives are every time you step out to serve, because the enemy wants nothing more than to make it about us; to have those of you who are wired to serve in this way to think it is about you, about your act, about what you are doing.

Those friends were compelled because they loved their friend and they wanted Jesus to transform his life. There was nothing about the actions of the friends that was about themselves. They knew Jesus was the one who was going to move. Jesus was the one that their friend needed. Jesus was at the center of it. So anytime you tutor at Calvary or Urban Ventures, and every time you bring a meal to Treehouse or serve at Loaves and Fishes, you have the opportunity to bring the kingdom of God to earth and to usher people into the presence of Jesus—the one who truly saves, who truly redeems, who truly rescues. Participating in the story of God is not an option for those of us who follow Christ. For those of us who have dedicated our lives to following Jesus, this is just not an option for us, because Jesus is about people, and so we get to be about people. It means that we get to start noticing people and noticing where God is inviting us to serve, whether it is on a trip to Nicaragua, visiting a nursing home, bringing a new mom a meal, or reaching out to your neighbor. We get to be a part of what God is doing in the world. We get to love Him, love people, and do whatever it takes to serve people for the sake of Christ.

We are going to close this morning by praying a prayer of confession together. It is a prayer where we are invited to take a posture of humility, a posture of surrender

regarding service. So I'm going to read it once, and then the second time I invite you to say it with me.

Lord, You asked for my hands, that they might be used for Your purpose. I gave them for a moment, but withdrew them, for the work was hard.

Lord, You asked for my mouth, to speak out against injustice. I gave You a whisper that I might not be accused.

Lord, You asked for my eyes, that I might see the needs of my neighbor. I closed them, for I did not want to feel responsible to respond.

Lord, You asked for my life, that You might work through me. I gave a small part, that I might not get too involved.

Lord, forgive my calculated efforts to serve You only when it is convenient, or safe, or easy. Fill me with Your Spirit, and ready me to do Your work, and fulfill Your will for my life. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.