

## Sermon on Luke 5

by

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Years ago there was a guideposts story about a mother who saved and saved to take her disabled child to our Lady of Lourdes in France where many believe if bathed in the water, there can be miraculous healing. When the women returned to the states all happy and thrilled, yet her child was unchanged, a neighbor asked if the mother was deeply disappointed that no healing had taken place. The mother quickly responded, but there was healing.

When my son and I bathed in the water of Lourdes, God cleaned my heart and I knew that I was the one to receive healing ... for God loved and accepted my son as he is.

Please join me in prayer:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. AMEN

We as a denomination have made some good efforts to be more inclusive with our language and within our facilities. We include closed captioning, as well as signing at the Annual Conference Session. We select

venues based on handicapped accessibility. Covenant has adopted the language of *Please rise in spirit or in body* – language that was offered to the Conference by the disability awareness committee. We have created wheelchair seating within the congregation, not set apart. We are careful to use microphones when speaking during worship, so that all might have a better opportunity to hear.

Often these services are added out of need. For instance, the first signing at ordination was for one of the new ordinands, Brian Fellows. Brian's son is deaf and Brian wanted his son to be fully included in this significant event. That was in 2010. Brian's son now works at Casowasco Camps, Conference, and Retreats. And we, as an annual conference, have signing at all worship services and closed captioning for all sessions of annual conference.

I am in awe of the persons who have overcome challenges in their life like Brian's son and their family, as well as the people who have helped others.

For instance, Temple Grandin – I highly recommend you watch the movie of the same title. Temple is about my age and born with autism. In an era when autistic children were kept out of the mainstream, Temple's mother was determined to provide every opportunity to her daughter. Way to go mom! As a teenager, Temple

saw how cows could be calmed down by being placed in a squeeze machine. Temple was able to design a squeeze machine for persons with autism providing the same calming effect.

Temple has become a leading advocate for persons with autism and she has redesigned the cattle industry.

Hardly anyone would have looked at the 4 year old who could not speak or communicate and see the potential in her to be a world-class leader, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University, and a 2017 inductee in the Women's Hall of Fame.

Hear now Temple's words:

“Parents get so worried about the deficits that they don't build up the strengths, but those skills could turn into a job ... These kids often have uneven skills ... They have differently-abled brains ... If I could snap my fingers and be nonautistic, I would not. Autism is part of what I am.”

My dad – most of you know how much respect I have for my father – you have only begun to hear the stories. In 1950, my dad was principal of Cortland High School. One of his best friends and teachers contracted polio. The teacher could no longer work since he was confined to a wheelchair. Dad had the shop class build a ramp for

access into the building and moved the classroom from the second floor to the first. He found one of the first overhead projectors, so his friend and colleague could continue to teach and not have his back to the classroom. Keep in mind there was no disability Act in 1950. The first Law was not set by congress until 1990.

I wish I could remember the teacher's name – its been a few years though. What I do remember is my father's care and action. I remember that the man continued to teach until it was time to retire. I also remember that this man and his wife were excellent bridge players; therefore dad built a removable ramp to our home for the times the couple came over to play bridge. Dad actively sought ways in which his colleague and friend could continue to be the person who existed before polio took his mobility.

Which brings me to the question in the sermon title. Are you a Ludwig van Beethoven or an Alexander Bell? Are you Temple Grandin or my dad? Are you a person who has worked through major challenges and adversities? Are you a person who has seen a place where you could help someone else? Are you both?

Thank you to Kevin and Circle of Friends for singing Joyful, Joyful this morning. Stunning music. When Beethoven completed this piece which is a part of his 9<sup>th</sup> and final symphony, he was completely deaf. The music resonated in this head. He put to paper what he could not

hear. During the first performance, Beethoven's back was to the audience and he was unaware of the enthusiastic response until a colleague turned him around to see the applause, the standing ovation and the hankies flying in the air.

Alexander Bell was strongly influenced by his family – his mother was deaf as was his wife. Through his employment at the first oral school for the deaf, Clarke School -- a school which required lip reading rather than sign language-- Bell met his wife Mabel Gardiner Hubbard. In an effort to restore his wife's hearing, Alexander Bell conducted telecommunication experiments. One of these experiments led to the invention of the telephone.

In Bell's words: *“When one door closes another door opens; but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us.*

And this quote from Bell: *“Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds.”*

I don't have personal knowledge and understanding of the mindset of Temple Grandin, Ludwig van Beethoven or Alexander Bell. I can speak to the mindset of my father. He was driven by his commitment to be a disciple of

Jesus Christ. He understood his part in being the hands and feet of Christ on earth. I am not saying that only a Christian would have known what to do – There are many people who would have done the same. But dad built a ramp because as a Christian, he had no other option but to help.

Eugene Peterson's translation the Message takes the Ephesians scripture and says this

“I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences ... We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.”

Humility. Paul says “And mark that you do this with humility” We sang today about being humble.

One of the greatest definitions I have been given on humility is the willingness to learn ... to be teachable... So when we sang this morning humble thyself in the sight

of the Lord, I am preparing myself to be teachable. I am preparing to have an open minded. I am allowing myself to learn something new from God.

We also sang He Who Began a Good Work in You.

God had planted the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony in Beethoven's head. Beethoven began work on the symphony in 1793 and it was first performed in 1824. 27 years. God had begun the good work in Beethoven. And God was faithful to complete it. Beethoven said, "It seemed unthinkable for me to leave the world forever, before I had produced all that I felt called upon to produce." Called upon to produce.

In addition to the scripture read by Valarie this morning, we saw in the video *We Carry Kevan* some friends helping another friend – Just like the guys in the Luke passage. The gospel reading said: Some men came carrying a paralyzed man 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. Jesus saw their faith.

This is exactly what Kevan's friends did – Kevan states – "Accessibility is not ramps or automatic doors – those things help – but ultimately accessibility is people helping people." people helping people ... hands and feet. Kevin

and his friends have redefined accessibility and shattered some preconceptions.

Where has God called us to produce? Where has God called us to shatter preconceptions and redefine accessibility? Where has God called us to be the hands and feet of Jesus now? Where do we need to cut a hole in the roof?

I like the idea of an elevator for this building. My knees hurt and sometimes just that half flight of stairs is painful. Yet, after preparing for this sermon and reading and researching how people have looked at a problem in new ways, I am seeking ways to be humble – teachable – about ways for the church to be accessible. The Church being a capitol C and not the building. I need other minds to weigh in and offer some ideas. Maybe one idea until we have an elevator is to take church to people who can't get to this building. Maybe until we have an elevator we build a ramp at the front door.

For weeks now Pastor Ann has been laying the ground work for this sermon. Do you remember the Equality is not always Justice with three children on blocks? Three differently sized children. For all to see over the fence, one needed no stool, one needed one stool and one child needed two stools. In a recent sermon she said, “We are

living a life worthy of our calling, when we help others and we share our faith. When what we do matches what we say.” Our Welcoming statement front of the bulletin - says full inclusion in The United Methodist Church. Do we mean it?

This is what I have heard from Pastor Ann in her sermons this fall. We are called to provide every opportunity for all of God’s children to fully participate in the life of the Church ... to fully participate in life. This is what it means for me when in the Lord’s prayer we pray ... thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven.

How then can God’s Kingdom be here on earth? The hymns, the stories and the scriptures this morning give me my answer.

I don’t need to invent a hearing machine. I do need to be patient when someone is speaking after having a stroke.

I don’t need to compose a symphony, but I do need to use the voice God has given me to sing with joy and gratitude.

I don’t need to build a ramp, but I do need to ask my friends to help me figure out a way to include all.

I don’t need to invent a machine for children with autism, but when I am working with these children I need to know what I should and should not do.

I do need to remain teachable – open minded -- humble.

I do need to recognize the work God has begun in me, and continue to allow God to work through me, so I might produce all that I have been called upon to produce.

I do need to involve the cooperation of many minds.

I do need to pour myself out for another in acts of love, alert at noticing differences.

I do need to be ready to redefine and be willing to shatter preconceptions.

I challenge you to think and find ways where you can begin to think differently about accessibility and disability. But for now what am I going to do?

Tracy: You're going to live so God can use you.

ME: Anywhere? Anytime?

Tracy Yes!