

4. A SAVIOUR WHO'LL GET HIS HANDS DIRTY. LUKE 5:12-32

It's common to hear today that we live in age of disruption. By that we mean something different to just change. A friend of mine has a plaque on her wall that says "Change is constant – growth is optional".

But while change is more a slow evolving or improvement in things, disruption is more like a volcanic eruption. New technologies emerge, new applications of new technologies are created, and the old way of doing things and looking at things are swept aside by new and sometimes better ways.

Disruption has been a regular aspect of life for a long time. My favourite example is the story of the so-called Horse Manure Crisis of the late 1890's.

The great cities of Europe and US had literally hundreds of thousands of horses plying the streets and depositing tons of manure every day. The mess and the flies created a crisis, without, it seems, any lasting solution.

Then along came the internal combustion engine, out of left field, and within 10 years the problem was on the way to being solved. More for people, but not so much the horses.

Not all disruption is physical and external though. Today a lot of disruption occurs because of the challenge to established ways of thinking about things, or established rules or laws.

In history, reading the Bible in one's native language was a disruption, as too the Reformation.

The greatest disruptor of all though was and is Jesus. The greatest disruption was Jesus on the cross, when he overturned Satan, Sin and Death.

But before that occurred, he disrupted the way people thought about God. The nations around Israel perceived their God or gods to be harsh, vindictive beings, to be feared. Israel had fallen into a way of thinking that perceived God as hard as well.

The 10 commandments and the laws of Israel, given by God to glorify God and the nations, had in fact been weaponised as a way to oppress people and give power to an elite religious few.

And today, Luke records for us how Jesus is the Great Disruptor – A Saviour not afraid to get his hands dirty.

Three separate stories about Jesus, three separate encounters but each related and teaching a lifesaving truth about who Jesus is.

1. An Outcast Brought Home (5:12-16)

¹² While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.^[b]

To have Leprosy in Biblical times was not to have so much a physical disease as much as a social disease. The collection of conditions translated then as leprosy included rashes, psoriasis, ulcers and other infectious skin conditions, and maybe also what is known as Hansen's disease today.

In the Old Testament purity and cleanness were symbolic of the holiness that God called his people to. For instance, food laws were enacted to remind Israel of their separateness and set-apartness to the nations.

So too with corruption and decay – physically and practically. *Leviticus 12 and 15 were principally concerned with such matters. Lev 20:7 “Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. ⁸ Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy.”*

The condition of Leprosy then, whether temporary or chronic, was part of taking purity seriously. It meant isolation and separation until clean.

In reality in New Testament times, it had come to mean heartless exclusion and discrimination. People with any leprous condition were cast out and shunned, especially in a religious sense.

This man approached Jesus with a serious condition. In an expression of faith in what Jesus might do: *‘... When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”’*

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

Jesus could have healed him by a word. He healed others from afar. But this man while suffering from a chronic disease, suffered equally and maybe more seriously from isolation and rejection – a social pariah.

And Jesus reached out and responded not just to the man’s condition but his predicament. “Willing? I am willing!” He touched him.

Jesus broke from the tradition. He treated the leper with compassion, touching and healing him. In doing so Jesus made himself unclean. In an echo of the cross, Jesus at this early stage becomes unclean for the so that the man might become clean.

14 Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

I like the way Jesus cares less about the icky concerns of others, and the religious scruples of some. A saviour not afraid to get his hands messy.
An Outcast healed and Home.

2. An Outcast Set Free (5:17-26)

The next encounter is remarkably similar for both Jesus and the person healed.

Some friends brought a paralysed man to Jesus, and Luke notes specifically this happened when ... vs 17 *“Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem.”*

The friends couldn’t get into the house to see Jesus, and there appeared to be no way the pharisees or teachers of the law were to going to make way for a paralysed man to be healed ...

Last week I asked you to join me in doing a little mind reading of Peter’s mind, and again this week I’m asking you to do the same of these religious leaders.

John 9 *As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*

Luke 13:4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I put it to you that the religious leaders were indifferent to the plight of sick people and disabled people because firstly they believed the sick people deserved it, through sin or bad luck, and secondly because they weren't in the caring business anyway.

That's why the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 is both so shocking but so memorable because the Jesus nailed the behaviour of the priest and lawyer ...

This paralysed man was a sinner – that was why he was in the mess he was ...

Well, they were certainly right about the first part of that – he was a sinner. And maybe they were right about the second part too. Maybe his paralysis was a consequence of his behaviour? We don't know. But either way they don't care about him at all.

He wants to walk, but whether he realised it that day or not what he needed more deeply is being set free, certainly from his sin, but of the condemnation too.

And that is why Jesus forgives him first and foremost. For whatever other reasons Jesus does that, he knows what the religious hypocrites are thinking, and he knows what this man deeply needs.

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?"

And to illustrate his power to forgive the man, he heals the man's paralysis. *²⁴ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So, he said to the paralysed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."* *²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.*

In doing both, he fore-borrows the healing and forgiveness that he will win for that man on the cross.

As far as popular thinking went, Jesus was messing with the way things worked. Jesus looked into the man's life and saw his deepest need was healing of his soul. Which he did. But in compassion he also set him free from his ailment and the ostracism and judgement of society.

An Outcast is Set Free

3. An Outcast Embraced (27-31)

²⁷ After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, ²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

I'm sure most of you know about tax collectors in the day. They were hated. They were considered traitors to their people. They were outcasts as far as the religious people and the elites were concerned.

They collected taxes for Rome. Foreign taxes, not temple taxes. To get their job they tendered for an area, and then to make a living added their margin on top to arrive at the tax people had to pay for this and that.

This man Levi clearly knew who Jesus was and had most likely listened to him. And when Jesus called him to join him, he did.

Like the fishermen last week, he got up, left everything and followed Jesus. We can assume that Jesus had said more to Levi than follow me. And we can assume that Levi understood more of Jesus' message.

The act of obedience by Levi to the call of Jesus was an act of faith and obedience on Levi's part.

²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Levi was a transformed person. The Jesus he met had transformed his life and set him free as well. He called his circle of friends together for a banquet. Tax collectors and others.

As far as the religious leaders were concerned, they were tax collectors and sinners! All of them.

“Why does he eat with these sinners?” In other words, why does he show friendliness to them. They thought that because he showed them friendship, related to them, hung out with them, that Jesus was accepting and condoning everything they did. Our problem as well.

What Jesus did with Levi, he was also offering the rest of Levi’s friends. He was offering them acceptance as people as a prelude to their repentance and his embracing them as followers – if only they would follow him.

³¹ Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

24. But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”

Conclusion

A SAVIOUR WHO’LL GET HIS HANDS DIRTY

I started formal ministry 47 years ago. A significant part of that ministry has been pastoring people in all sorts of situations of life. I’ve visited people in their sickness or sadness, held people’s hands while they died, sat with couples whose marriages were struggling, comforted loved ones who mourned, wept with people, rejoiced with people.

Some of those occasions have probably traumatised me one way or another. And for most of them, outwardly I’m trying to be helpful and professional, and inside I’m recoiling at the sadness or grief and feeling quite powerless to do what I can to help.

But I’ve always believed that I am in some small way there physically in the place of Jesus, showing Jesus’ love and compassion and care to people in the messiness of life.

I never fail to be hugely impressed at the medical personnel, the allied health people, counsellors, ambos, police social workers, legal people, and many others who help people.

People who get their hands messy every day, so to speak, and often literally.

Who is the Jesus we have met?

A Man, the Son of Man, who shows us how to love God with everything we have and are.

A man, Son of David, who holds fast to God and his word, and leads the way for us to Trust Him.

A man, Son of God, who knows us, and our lives, and still accepts us and calls us to follow him.

And today, A Saviour who embraces outcasts and brings them home to our Heavenly Father.

Touching and healing a person with a contagious and disfiguring disease, Jesus is far more concerned with compassion and healing. He cared for and loved that man.

The healing of his physical sickness was emblematic of his healing of that man's isolation, and imprisonment in society's shunning of him.

And the one who heals the outcast, had the power to do far more. And did on the cross. We're invited by Luke to see this man's faith in the words "if you are willing." And Christ's welcoming him into new birth with "I am willing."

So it is with the paralysed man, and the tax collector. Each in their own way outcasts, but Jesus doesn't care about society norms.

And don't be confused – Jesus cares about sin, caring enough to become a man and die to pay these people's penalty on the cross.

Today our takeaway message must include "This is who Jesus is to us."

Our Lord and Saviour who did not hold back from getting his hands dirty and messy in our life. He knows the mess. He understands the shame and exclusion we may feel.

Who is the Jesus we meet today? He is magnificent ...