

So, here we are in week four of our series, Jesus and We. Over these weeks we've thought about things that should drive us as believers. In week 1, we talked about faith and that we're expected to be faith-filled, big-thinking risk-takers who never insult God with small thinking or safe living.

In week 2 we talked about serving, saying that we're not supposed to be spiritual consumers, but spiritual contributors, because the church does not exist for us – we are the church and we exist for the world.

In week 3 we talked about giving, and that we should lead with irrational generosity because we truly believe it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Today we're thinking about reaching people who are far from God. In the reading today we saw that Jesus healed the man who had been brought by his friends. After that he called Matthew, the tax collector. What we miss is how shocking that was for the people in those days. The religious people, the Pharisees, simply couldn't understand why Jesus would speak to someone like that, let alone ask for his loyalty. When they complained about it Jesus said that Matthew was exactly the type of person that he had come for, not those who thought they were right with God.

Jesus did not come for those who have it all together. He came for sick, broken, lost people. He came for sinners like you and me. There are so many people in our community who don't know Jesus and, if we are honest, their first opportunity to do that is unlikely to be by walking through the doors of our building. If your childhood memory of church is going with the school to uncomfortable pews, a Minister in robes and a long service full of incomprehensible words, what would draw you back as an adult? If you've only been to church for a wedding or funeral what would entice you to come on a Sunday? If you've never been to church why would you start coming now?

Towards the start of our reading today four men brought their friend to see Jesus. They were so determined that when they couldn't physically enter the building through the door, they made a hole in the roof. It's important to notice that before Jesus heals the man he deals with his biggest need first - his spiritual need, to be forgiven. And so our thought for the day is this: **we will do whatever it takes to reach people who don't know Jesus.** We do it because that's their greatest need and we will do it to reach people no one else is reaching even if it means doing things no one else is doing.

In previous weeks we had an illustration involving apple pie but I don't have one today – I just like apple pie! Anyway, we did have a scale of 1 to 10, we have that again today, where 1 would be people who simply don't care about where anybody else is with Jesus. On the lower end of the scale are people who have never prayed for a single person to get to know Jesus. You've never invited anyone you knew was not a Christian to come to church. On the upper end of the scale are those who have led people to Christ, or are praying for people by name to come to Christ, or regularly invite people to come with them to church. Let's just be honest. It's easy to say we believe we should do it but if we look at our actions what would they tell us? So, where would you put yourself on this scale?

There are two important things that I think all of us who are Christ followers are called to do in order to love people into a relationship with Jesus. The first thing is that I believe **we are called to bear some burdens.** We are called to care for those who are in a place of hurt or in need. That's what happens in verse 3 of our story, *"Some men came bringing to Jesus a paralysed man, carried by four of them."*

They didn't go to the man's house and say we know it's hard for you but you should really make the effort to go and see Jesus, why don't you get someone to take you? No, what they did was get involved in his life. They cared enough about him to carry him as far as they needed to in order to get him to Jesus.

I think one of the weaknesses for lots of us in terms of sharing our faith is that we do it in a way that resembles a drive-by shooting. You know what a drive-by shooting is? You drive by, and you shoot somebody. A lot of

people do what I call drive-by witnessing. In other words, they're not involved in someone's life. They just kind of drive by, roll down the window and go, "Jesus loves you. Come to my church." Like those are the nice ones, and there's the rude ones, "You're going to hell. Turn or burn, you sinner. You're going to hell where the worm never dies and then you'll be sorry. Jesus loves you, but." It might not be as blatant as that but we do think we've done wonderfully if we slip into a conversation that we go to church – that's ok but we need to be more proactive than that.

You might say that you don't know enough to share your faith. I like the old saying that people don't care how much you know. They first want to know how much you care. They want to know, "Do you care about me? Are you willing to be involved in my life?" As followers of Jesus we are expected to bear burdens for other people. We don't just invite people to church, we bring them to church through getting involved in their lives.

Think about the picture - Jesus is in the house and he's teaching, but it's so busy there is no room for anybody else. The four men arrive carrying their friend, but they can't get in. If it was today people would be going, "Whoa, that was good. I'm writing that down. I'll remember to tweet that. Oh, don't forget to get a picture of Jesus." Instagram, hashtag, "Hanging with Jesus." What happens sometimes is we are in church and, like the crowd in the house, there's people who are in need, and we have our backs turned to them, doing our little Christian thing. We have our own little language. "Praise the Lord, brother, hallelujah, I love your testimony."

We're doing our Christian thing, and, the whole time, there's people who need Jesus. We're so into our Christian thing, we have our back turned to the people who are in need. Even though our heart doesn't say it, basically, our actions are saying, "We don't really care about you. You can just go to hell." I know it's rough. It's not our heart, but our actions say, "We don't really care about you. We're doing our own little Christian gig."

When they're in need, and we bear some burdens, then we earn the right to be heard. We don't drive by and just shout, "Jesus loves you." We care about people. We show them his love before we even tell them about his love.

I read a story this week about a lady called Amber who is an estate agent. She was working on a contract which involved a couple who were divorcing. She was selling their house and then buying another one for each of them so she was going to get three commissions from this one deal. She stood to make a lot of money, however, at church one Sunday there was a plug for a new book about marriage and the difference God makes in a marriage relationship. She decided to buy the couple a book because she knew they were having a real struggle. She wanted them to see she recognized their burden and that she was concerned for them. Each one read the book and God worked in their hearts, restoring their relationship and, as a result, they came to faith. Amber lost her commission because she was willing to show that she cared for them.

I don't know how this will play out for you, but I guarantee all of you that, if you have eyes to see, you're going to see people who are hurting and you're going to see people who need you to listen and you're going to see people that need help on the side of the road and you're going to see people at work that you didn't like and, suddenly, you find out that they're actually in the middle of hell and that you can love them into a better place, and eventually into church.

I believe that God calls of us to bear some burdens, four men carried their friend to Jesus, and we need to ask God to give us that same desire to bring people to Jesus. God is going to call us to bear some burdens.

Just in case you're sitting there thinking, "Wait a minute, this is all about us getting people to church, but you've been telling us we need to get out of church. What's going on?" Well, here's a question, "What has been in your mind when you're thinking of bringing people to church?" Have you been thinking about the Sunday service? Have you been thinking about the building? Because the church does not exist for us – we are the church and we exist for the world. We need to meet together, of course we do. But if our meeting becomes a time or place where, without us even being aware, we end up excluding people then we've got the cart firmly

before the horse. For the vast majority of people the journey of faith doesn't start by walking through the doors of a church building. It starts with someone who introduces them to Jesus. It may have been that your parents dragged you to church as a child; perhaps you came because your children were going to Sunday School and you thought you'd check it out, but there was something in the welcome, atmosphere or the message that made you want to come back. The thing is it is usually a process that needs a starting point, and that's where you and I come in. If we are faith-filled, big-thinking, risk-takers who remember that as the church we exist for the world, and live sharing irrational generosity then people will be drawn to us because they see God at work in our lives. Of course we still have to explain the reason we live like that – but it's all connected.

Point 1: God expects us to bear some burdens.

Our second point, then, is this **God allows us to break some rules**. In this story, we see four friends who massively break some rules to get their friend to Jesus. *We will do whatever it takes to reach people who don't know Jesus.*

These men climbed up onto the roof and began to dig a hole. I always wondered if one of them was like a Boy Scout. He was like, "Good thing I brought my shovel. You never know when you'll need a shovel." In those days the houses had beams that were about three feet apart with some branches that were covered in mud, made from straw, clay and manure. It was pretty strong stuff, probably in every way! You can imagine this, they're digging through and then they're in the house and, suddenly, the roof starts falling in the house. The owner is, like, "I don't think insurance is going to cover this one," and light comes in, and then you got these four guys who don't just *want* to get their friend to Jesus. They have to.

What I love about this is these are guys who are not taking obstacles as a sign that God's stopping them. They were willing to do whatever it takes to get their friend to Jesus. And we need to take on that same attitude with our friends, neighbours, colleagues and family.

Here is the key. **To reach people no one's reaching, we're going to have to do things no one's doing**. We're going to do some things that maybe normal churches don't do, and we're going to do them all time.

One of the things I read about is Church Online. It's been one of the most heavily debated ideas in church circles. It was launched several years ago, and all sorts of people still debate the validity, the ecclesiology. I mean, can you really do church online? While people continue to debate it and argue about it, it reached over 5 million people last year all around the world.

Whether or not people believe it's really church they have decided to do things no one is doing to reach people in places that they can't even own a Bible.

Then they thought there was more upside potential on this, so they decided to buy Google AdWords to help bring extra people to Church Online. If someone typed in on Google "church online," then an ad would pop up which said, "Searching for church online? Why not try Church Online?"

The problem is, you guessed it, nobody's searching for Church Online, so we asked ourselves, "What are people searching for?" and someone said, "Naked women." Now, please don't go home and search for "naked women" because you're going to get a whole lot of stuff you might not want... Do not do this - but, if someone did type it in an ad would pop up and say, "Searching for 'naked women?' Why not try Church Online?"

They have an amazing click-through rate. You think about it. Naked ladies. Why not Church- We'll have to do things no one's doing. I think the church should be the most creative, innovative organization around because we serve the God of creation. Several hundred years ago, this was the case. Just a few centuries back, the church was the centre of the city. The church was the epicentre of community. The church drove the arts.

Somewhere along the way, what happened? We delegated innovation to Apple. We handed off creativity to Hollywood. We said that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were where you can have relationships. We

allowed the government to meet the needs of the poor, when we are the best equipped organization to do all that and far more. That's why I believe with all my heart that we must stop 'going to church' and start being the church.

As the church, when we recognize that Jesus didn't come for the healthy, but he came for the sick, and that we're all sick and we all need his grace, when we recognize who he is and what he's done, our only reasonable response is to give him our whole lives. I want to be part of

- a church that doesn't judge those who don't know Jesus, but loves them;
- a church that is happy to bear burdens, get messy and get involved with people who don't yet know Jesus;
- a church where people are willing to break established rules, and cut through some religious crap where they have to, to bring people to Jesus;
- a church that is full of people who know what it means to be a sinner, and what it means to be forgiven;
- a church that is will do whatever it takes to reach people who don't yet know Jesus;
- a church that will do things no one else is doing because God is calling us to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus.