Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue a sermon series titled, “So You Can Know For Sure.” It is a study through the Gospel of Luke.

The text we are studying today is ▶ Luke 5:17-26. I didn’t plan it this way, but it turns out that this text is the perfect segue for what’s happening after my sermon.

I have the privilege of baptizing four people this morning. In addition to their faith in Jesus, they all have something else in common. In one way or another, someone brought them to Jesus.

In our text, we have an extraordinary example of ordinary people bringing someone to Jesus. And from their example, we are going to learn something about how we can do it, too.

If you’ve been going to church for a while, you may have a flashing yellow light going off in your head right now: “Caution: Evangelism sermon ahead. Prepare for guilt and awkwardness.”

Relax. I know those sermons. I have probably even delivered one or two. I think you’ll find this one to be liberating and encouraging. Not because of me. But because of the text.

It begins in ▶ Luke 5:17.

> ESV Luke 5:17 On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. . . .

We know from the parallel account in the gospel of Mark that the phrase, ▶ “on one of those days” is a while after the events of the immediately

preceding context. During the time gap, Jesus had returned to Capernaum, which became a kind of home base for his earthly ministry.

Jesus is in a home, probably the home of Simon Peter. And all kinds of people have gathered in the home from all over the country. Even some Jewish religious leaders known as "Pharisees and teachers of the law" have come from as far as Jerusalem—a trip which would have taken several days.

This is in keeping with what we learned last week: Jesus had gone viral. News of his miraculous healing power kept on spreading and crowds kept on gathering wherever he went.

What is new in our text today is that Jesus is now attracting the attention of Jewish religious leaders, who are coming to check him out.

The average Capernaum home may have accommodated 50 people standing close together.[1] And the place is packed.

Jesus takes advantage of the opportunity to pursue his priority. Here in verse 17, it says ▶ "he was teaching."

The last part of ▶ verse 17 adds a potentially confusing detail. It says,

> ESV Luke 5:17 . . . And the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

It almost sounds like the power to heal comes and goes from Jesus, as if he has the power some times and not others. But I don't think that is what this means. Instead, I think this reflects Jesus' availability and disposition to heal.[2] And it anticipates a healing that is about to occur.

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[1] Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 139.
[2] Valdés, Alberto S., "The Gospel according to Luke," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. by Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 247.

Moreover, Luke may be alluding to Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1, where it says, "the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me."[3] In the first century, these words were taken by Jews to be spoken by the Messiah, who would come one day to usher in a new age of deliverance for those in need of healing, both physical and spiritual.

You may recall on a prior visit to the synagogue in Capernaum, recorded in Luke 4, Jesus opened the scroll of Isaiah and read from Isaiah 61:1-2 and then said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In doing so, Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the one who ushers in the age of grace, where deliverance is offered.

So, when Luke writes, "And the power of the Lord was with him to heal," it may be an affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah, as prophesied in Isaiah.

▶ Verses 18 and 19 continue.

> ESV Luke 5:18 And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus,
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> ▶ ESV Luke 5:19 but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

The men bringing their paralyzed friend are unnamed. We know from Mark that there are four of them.

[3] DelHousaye, John, *The Fourfold Gospel, Vol. 2: From Summons to Signs* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 441.

That our four guys show up a little late is understandable. They had to round up and carry their paralyzed friend. By the time they get to the house, the crowd is overflowing with people who were able to run there straightaway. The four guys can't even get close to the door. Everybody's trying to press in to see Jesus and hear what he's saying.

The crowd is keeping the paralyzed man from Jesus.

I don't want to be too hard on the crowd. After all, there are certainly worse places to be than in a house listening to what Jesus has to say. These people are interested in the teachings of Jesus.

And some of them are biblical scholars. There are certainly worse things to be than biblical scholars.

But the fact remains: They didn't let the paralytic in. Their backs were turned. The needy one is ignored. We can only imagine the finer details of the story.

I can imagine one of the four guys tapping somebody on the shoulder: "Excuse me, but we're trying to get our paralyzed friend inside to see Jesus. Would you be so kind as to make way?"

Maybe the response was, "I was here first."

Or "Hey, I came all the way from Jerusalem for this."

Or maybe there was no response at all. Just a turn of the head, like the driver who won't let you in line and won't even make eye-contact, as if you don't exist.

These aren't horrible people, just normal people—people who are maybe a little self-absorbed—people who are spectators—people who don't want

to give up their spot because they themselves are looking to find out about or get something from Jesus. Their primary spiritual focus is inward, not outward. It is probably not their intent to block someone from coming to Christ; it is merely an unintended consequence of fixating on something for themselves.

The typical Palestinian home during that time had a flat roof that usually consisted of wooden beams with thatch and compacted earth. Rooves with tiles were less common, but the original Greek word for “tile” can mean, “clay,” so Luke may simply be referring to a thatched mud-clay roof, which would harmonize with the parallel account in Mark.

Access to the roof was usually by an outside stairway, and that’s how our four guys likely get up on the roof. Then they dig open the roof and lower the paralytic down to Jesus on his bed, which was more like a palette, or stretcher, or mat. It is not a Sealy Posturepedic mattress with box springs.

We can only imagine the conversation among the four guys and the paralyzed man.

The paralytic says, “Are you guys sure about this? What if I fall?”

And one of the guys says, “Don’t worry. We got ya.”

Another one—the jokester—says, “What’s the worst that could happen? You’re already paralyzed.”

If I were Jesus, I might have been irritated. Jesus is there in the house, speaking to a crowd packed in like sardines. They’re all hanging on his every word. It’s every preacher’s dream. He’s got their undivided attention. And then it happens.

Directly above him, dirt and debris begin to fall. It's falling right where Jesus is. And he loses the crowd mid-sentence. Everybody is looking up at the ceiling. They hear footsteps and muffled voices and chipping. And then the roof cracks open and hands and feet poke through like a chick from an egg.

And everybody realizes that somebody's digging through the roof!

Jesus and those closest to him step away from the falling debris and watch the intruders widen the hole.

Is this some kind of repair work? Don't they realize there's an important meeting going on? Don't they realize Jesus is there trying to teach?

The four guys begin to lower a disabled man on a pallet. Right down to Jesus. On purpose.

What can we say about the four guys who bring the disabled man to Jesus?

Let's call them bringers because they are bringing the man to Jesus.

It seems to me that these bringers were not always bringers. Somebody must have brought them first. Perhaps they were told about Jesus. Perhaps they themselves had previously stood and watched and listened to Jesus, just like the other people crowded in the house that day.

How else would they have come to know that Jesus is the healer? How else would they have come to know that he is the forgiver of sins? How else would they have come to believe in him?

At some point, the four believers became bringers. They grew from being self-absorbed spectators to being so concerned about the welfare of their

needy friend that they're willing to do almost anything to bring him to Jesus. They are determined. When faced with an obstacle, they don't throw up their hands and say, "Well, I guess God closed that door." Nope. They climb the roof and make a door. They find a way to bring their friend to Jesus.

I say "friend" because it is hard to imagine that these four bringers just happen to stumble upon a paralyzed guy they had never met before and then randomly decide to drag him to Jesus against his will. "You're coming to Jesus, whether you like it or not."

No.

There must have been a prior relational context. There must have been a friendship in which the paralyzed man had come to trust his friends enough to allow them to bring him to Jesus.

We don't know for sure the nature of their friendship or what they may have talked about. But it is not far-fetched to assume that, in the rhythm of their relationship, they've already had conversations about Jesus. This is not a Jesus ambush.

And the four guys are not all talk. They demonstrate their love for their paralyzed friend. What else could explain the extraordinary lengths they go to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus? Isn't it their sacrificial love and concern for his well-being?

We may cringe at the audacity of the four guys to gouge a man-sized hole in the roof of somebody else's home. But let's think about this.

As I mentioned, this is probably Peter's house, and the four guys probably know it. Capernaum is a small town, and Peter is a fellow believer and a leader in the Jesus movement. The guys probably reason that Peter

would understand their zeal to bring their friend to Jesus. And they'll make good on the roof later, after their friend is healed.

These four guys are our example, and the ▶ big idea I draw from them is this: Find a way to bring a friend to Jesus.

I am not talking about a canned approach to evangelism where you awkwardly try to shoehorn Jesus talk into a conversation with a stranger with the hope of notching a conversion.

When I was a junior in college, I remember sitting in the grass by myself in the mall of the University of Arizona, Arizona's first and finest university. Some stranger walks up to me and he is obviously terrified.

He says in a quiverish voice, "Did you know that God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life?"

I had already come to faith in Jesus between my freshman and sophomore years largely because of my girlfriend, Cathy, who had brought me to Jesus. I knew where this guy was headed, so I said, "I already believe in Jesus."

The guy said, "Please let me finish," as if had a quota to meet. He continued through the four spiritual laws and finally asked me if I wanted to pray to receive Christ as my Savior.

I reiterated, "I already believe in Jesus."

And he said, "Are you sure?" as if he were desperate to make a sale.

I said, "I appreciate the effort, brother, but I already believe."

It was awkward and embarrassing for both of us. I am not knocking the guy or his approach. It took guts. And his approach is better than no approach at all. But it just seemed off-putting and ineffective back then, and even more so today.

To me, finding a way to bring a friend to Jesus today is about cultivating a relationship for the sake of the relationship—a relationship in which I pray for, listen to, eat with, and lovingly serve the needs of a friend. And in the context and rhythm of that friendship, I find a way, by the Spirit of God, to bring my friend to Jesus, either by sharing my Jesus story or inviting him to church.

The four men in our story find a way to bring their friend to Jesus.

▶ Verse 20 records Jesus' response.

> ESV Luke 5:20 And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

When it says, ▶ "he saw their faith," I interpret the plural "their" to include all of them: the four men *and* the paralytic.

The fact that Jesus then singles out the paralytic individually in saying, "Man, your sins are forgiven you," suggests that his faith is brand new, while the faith of the bringers is not.

The idea of seeing faith is intriguing. How do you see something invisible? Well, it's hard to imagine anybody doing something this bold without believing. Their actions demonstrate invisible faith like a flag demonstrates invisible wind.

It is also intriguing that Jesus connects the faith of the bringers with the forgiveness of the one they brought. Their faith was somehow instrumental in the spiritual healing of the paralytic.

How so?

I take it that the paralytic received forgiveness because he himself believed in Jesus in that moment.

Moreover, the faith of the four bringers definitely played a role in bringing their friend to faith. God used the four bringers to bring life to the paralytic.

What can we say about the faith of the four bringers?

I think the faith in view here includes faith in Jesus for eternal life. The bringers were born-again believers well before they ever brought their friend to Jesus.

But the faith evidenced in this text also seems to go beyond their initial faith required for eternal salvation. These four believing bringers also have a different kind of faith—faith that their sacrifices, their efforts, their struggles to bring life to their friend will be worth it. All the relational investment; all the carrying, climbing, digging, and lowering; all the other people thinking they are crazy fanatics who dig holes in other people's rooves—they are persuaded that it will all be worth it.

The bringers were saved by faith at a moment in time in the past, and now they are living by faith day by day going forward, bringing life to others, including their friend.

People do need to know about the love and grace of God manifest in the free gift of eternal life available through faith alone in Christ alone.

But there's more to demonstrating the love of Christ than saying things. There's also doing things. Like reaching out to meet the basic human needs of a friend in the name of Christ.

In our text, the bringers compassionately work to meet the physical need of their friend. And in the process, their friend ends up receiving the most important thing: the spiritual healing and forgiveness of Christ. Jesus deals with the whole person.

Anybody you know need Jesus?

Not everyone in the crowd is appreciative of Jesus' declaration of forgiveness. ▶ Verse 21 says,

> ESV Luke 5:21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

The religious leaders are vexed, and understandably so.

If you were to rob a bank, and if I then declared that your robbery is forgiven, you might appreciate the thought, but you would think I was a nut job. I have no authority to forgive your sins against others.

Unless, of course, I am God.

To which you would quickly verify, "But, Bob, you are definitely not God."

Which is precisely the line of thinking of the scribes and Pharisees. They do not believe that Jesus is God. They consider him to be a fraud. Therefore, they believe it is blasphemous for Jesus to claim to forgive the sins of the paralyzed man. Only God has such authority.

In ▶ verses 22 and 23, Jesus responds to their thoughts, which in itself is a testimony to his deity.

> ESV Luke 5:22 When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts?”
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> ▶ ESV Luke 5:23 “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?”

If Jesus were a fraud, it would be easier for him to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” because the claim cannot be disproved.

It would be harder for Jesus to say to the paralyzed man, “rise and walk,” because then he would be forced to back up his claim with a miracle, which a fraud wouldn’t be able to do.

So, Jesus does the harder thing, he heals the man, to prove that he has authority to do the easier thing, to forgive the man. Beginning in ▶ verse 24, Jesus addresses first the leaders, then the paralytic.

> ESV Luke 5:24 “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.”
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> ▶ ESV Luke 5:25 And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

We are left to imagine just how the man now forgiven and healed is glorifying God. Maybe skipping, dancing, shouting praises, laughing, crying, praying, spreading the great news of how he was forgiven and healed by Jesus. And the present tense of the verb suggests he keeps on doing it.

Interestingly, the very same crowd that would not let the paralytic enter now has no problem letting him leave. When God is in the room, things change.

Think about how the four bringers must have felt in that moment. Put yourself in their sandals. In all likelihood, they have prayed for their friend. They have shared meals with him and laughed together. They have gone to a lot of effort and taken a big risk to bring their friend to Jesus. And now they see in a fresh way the love of Jesus. They see their friend experience it, too, through faith. They see their friend forgiven and healed. They see their friend glorifying God. There is no greater joy.

In fact, the whole place is glorifying God. ▶ Verse 26 explains,

> ESV Luke 5:26 And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.”

All this because four ordinary guys bought into one ▶ big idea: Find a way to bring a friend to Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, I will shortly be baptizing four people. In every case without exception, somebody found a way to bring them to Jesus.

Through their baptism and testimony, each one will be glorifying God for the spiritual healing and forgiveness they have received.

And the whole place will be glorifying God and filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.”

Let’s pray. Lord, help us to find a way to bring a friend to Jesus. Show us who and how and when. Amen.