

Sermon Transcript

A Call for a Different Lens

Luke 24:48-49 and Acts 3:1-21 | Second Sunday After Pentecost | June 2, 2024 | John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in faith,

I listened in as my three youngest kids had a conversation on the ride to school the other day.

One of the kids remarked that someone spent \$70 on a hat.

I just listened. I wanted to see where this went.

They were in disbelief and didn't think this was a wise way to spend money.

I suggested that the things that they spent their money on weren't what other people would.

Then, one of my kids said, "dumb people spend their money..."

Before he could finish, I stopped him. Maybe there's a different way he could say that.

"Stupid people spend their money..."

I stopped him again.

He tried one more time. "NOT fantastic people..."

I finally let him go with that.

He finished by suggesting drugs and alcohol weren't wise things to spend money on.

Again, to him, these aren't wise choices. But what I attempted to help him realize was that the person making choices different from him shouldn't be called "dumb, stupid, or even not fantastic."

Even at a young age, our language matters. The way we use adjectives before nouns—basically, describing the person based off their negative quality before seeing them as a person—can be a hard habit to break.

We do this all the time.

We label others by seeing something external about them that dehumanizes or demeans them.

This might seem harmless, but even in the Bible, there are consequences.

Michal Beth Dinkler, a New Testament professor at Yale, writes:

Sermon Transcript

Disability rights advocates caution against echoing biblical rhetoric that equates humans with their disabilities; for example, instead of “the lame man,” we can use phrases such as “the man who was born lame.” To some, this might seem unnecessarily cumbersome or like its merely semantics, but phrases like “the lame man,” “the paralytic,” or “the blind man” treat the person as though that physical condition is all they are, as though a bodily characteristic fully defines them.

Think about how many stories fit that description.

This happens a lot, doesn't it? Jesus “heals”—which is amazing. Of course being “healed” is a good thing. The caution is to assume that the version of the person who had the miracle performed is now a better person because they aren't what they once were.

The man born blind or, as in today's story, the man lame from birth, at least identifies the human first and then identifies what will be changed.

What happens to the man after Peter heals him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth? He clings to Peter and John—he clings to the community that sees him and recognizes him. He becomes part of this group.

Positive naming can lead to a deeper sense of belonging.

Faith was approached by an organization this winter asking us to provide space for community members who sometimes fit into that category of being marginalized.

The 501c3 is called [Trosnade](#) and their work brought them to Faith last summer, yet the dream behind this organization continues to grow.

I asked their founder, Rachel Huset-Downs, to share more about what they do and how they'll be utilizing our space on the 2nd floor of the Christian Education wing this summer.

VIDEO

It's subtle, but did you notice how Rachel talks? She works with individuals with differing abilities. She talked about meaningful and dignified work.

She used the term partners. This isn't a ministry done for someone—it's a ministry done with individuals in our community to build trust and support and to provide a safe place.

It's my hope that through our strengthened work together, our worshiping community could see our neighbors through a new lens.

Dinkler, the professor from Yale, adds, “no one should be defined solely by one attribute, physical or otherwise, and it allows for diversity in responses to those specific realities. Not every

Sermon Transcript

person who is blind, for instance, thinks or feels the same way about blindness; those with sight should not automatically assume that physical healing is desired. No one should assume they understand others' experiences of what it means to be in the bodies they are in."

To step back in the stories about Jesus, and now, as we read in the book of Acts, the apostles will demonstrate the gift of the Holy Spirit through miracles.

These are amazing!

Yet, the biggest gift of these miracles is to witness how the crowds react to those who come in the name of the LORD.

The healing is depicted as an undeniable sign of the apostles' godliness and the truth of their message.

A subtle impact is that the text pulls attention away from the man with the disability and toward the apostles.

- ***Where is our attention?***
- ***Do we focus on those our society tends to marginalize and stereotype as powerless, or on the ones who claim God's power?***
- ***When might those not actually be separate at all?***
- ***When do those whose bodies are marginalized have a great deal to teach about God's miraculous power?***

Luther Seminary professor, Matt Skinner, wrote a thoughtful reflection on the book of Acts. In this story of healing, he looks at the work of prophets to provide a new vision of what God is up to.

He suggests that there are visions of justice for those who continually suffer injustice. Visions of all people enjoying everlasting security—of peace, health, and abundance established by God.

Because the truth is, we don't always see it.

We see the things that are wrong. The things that are dumb, stupid, and not fantastic.

And we dwell on that.

How can God be present when we can't get our eyes to move past the things we find imperfect?

Skinner said, **"I occasionally have to remind my students not to fault the Bible for failing to give precise descriptions of what the future look like when God**

Sermon Transcript

has finished constructing it. All language, metaphors, and images are bound to fall short.

Maybe the point of the ambiguity is to call our imagination into action.”

That’s why the vision of Trosnade is exciting—Rachel is helping us call our imagination into action (**SLIDE**). It might help us re-imagine what healing looks like.

Where will this lead? What will happen in the future?

We don’t know. God’s still building it!!!

That’s exciting. It’s liberating to know that whatever we face in the future, God’s at work and is part of it.

Think about a time you’ve been picked on for your appearance or a quality that you were self-conscious about. When we have so much else to offer, it’s frustrating to be seen as something less than.

By pointing to the work of Christ, this can breathe new life into our outlook on what God is doing.

We can look upon God's creation with pride.

We can see ourselves as beloved, cared for children of God... and when we do that, we can't help but see that characteristic first when we look at others. We'll see that the people God has created are pretty fantastic. Amen.