

# How Jesus interacted with people, including disabled people, and what that teaches us

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. It's lovely to be here with you this morning and to return after yesterday's training session. So yeah, I'm blessed to be with you again this day. Our reading this morning is taken from Luke's Gospel, Chapter 5. Luke's Gospel, Chapter 5. And I'll be reading the story of the man who was lowered through the roof, which starts at verse 17 and runs on to verse 26. So Luke, Chapter 5, verses 17 to 26. And I'll be reading from the New International Readers Version. It's part of the New International Version family, but it's a simpler language set and it's been devised specifically to make it more accessible and more inclusive.

And so continuing the theme of the weekend, I'm going to be reading from this version. But do follow it in whichever version you've got with you this morning. Let's read God's word together, shall we?

One day Jesus was teaching. Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. They had heard that the Lord had given Jesus the power to heal the ill. So some men came carrying a man that could not walk. He was lying on a mat. They tried to take him into the house to place him in front of Jesus. They could not find a way to do this because of the crowd. So they went up on the roof. Then they lowered the man on his mat through the opening in the roof tiles. They lowered him into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw that they had faith, he spoke to the man. He said, friend, your sins are forgiven. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to think, who is this fellow who can say such an evil thing? Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus knew what they were thinking. So he asked, why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

So he spoke to the man who could not walk again. I tell you, he said, get up, take your mat and go home. Right away the man stood up in front of them. He took his mat and went home praising God. God, everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with wonder. They said, we have seen unusual things today. Now we're looking at that passage and some other encounters that Jesus had with people who had disability. But first we're going to sing again. And we're going to sing that wonderful song. We want to see Jesus lifted high. So as we come together to just, yeah, share God's word together, think about what Jesus did as he encountered people with disabilities. And what that teaches us 2,000 years later, we'll be exploring that through three or four stories of Jesus, as well as stories about some building blocks, a bank, and some stories about health and safety, and a story about hello. So that's what we're going to be exploring for the next few minutes. Let's first of all, though, pray that God will share with us as we spend this time together. Father, we do thank you for this opportunity to come together around your word.

[ 4 : 26 ] And we pray that you would speak to us through it and through the things that we talk about this morning, that you would touch our hearts, that you would touch our minds, that you would touch our souls, that you would teach us something new of yourself and teach us something new that we can do as we learn from you, our teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So we looked at the story of the man lowered through the roof. It's an extraordinary story, isn't it? Here's this man and his friends who are wanting to come and see Jesus, are wanting to come and hear Jesus. And they've heard that Jesus is a healer. And they want to bring their friend to Jesus, to bring him before Jesus. And I'm sure that a key motivation for them as they brought their friend or wanted to bring their friend to Jesus was perhaps to see whether Jesus would heal their friend as well. I like to think that they'd also want to come into Jesus' presence to hear what Jesus had to

say. And as they approached the place where Jesus was speaking, as they got there, they found that they couldn't get in. It was packed with people who had come to hear what Jesus had to say. And so we all know the story. It's such a familiar story to us, isn't it? That they take their friend up onto the roof.

What an extraordinary scene that must have been, as they clambered up onto the roof with their friend and then found a way to lower their friend through the roof in front of Jesus. The passage in whatever translation you're looking at tells us that the folk were a bit surprised when suddenly there's this man arriving through the roof. I'm sure we'd be quite surprised if that was happening this morning. But Jesus doesn't seem to have been surprised at all. And as this man appears before him, Jesus sees this man, this man who couldn't walk, who is brought by his friends to be put in front of Jesus. And the whole crowd are there, they're expectant, wondering what Jesus is going to do. Many of them will have seen and heard of Jesus healing others in the weeks and months before. And their anticipation will be that Jesus perhaps is going to heal this man too. But Jesus does something extraordinary. First of all, Jesus looks at this man and he sees his faith. And he sees him as a person. And he sees him as a person who has hope in Jesus, who has faith in Jesus, and his friends too. And so the first thing that Jesus does isn't to heal him, but is to forgive him his sins. He says friend. Wow, what a powerful word that is, isn't it?

How glorious to be called friend by Jesus. And he says friend, because of your faith, the faith of your friends, your sins are forgiven. And that creates some controversy amongst the Pharisees and the teachers of the law that are there, because they question Jesus' authority to be able to forgive this man for his sins. It's that surely only God can forgive sins. Now we know that Jesus is God made flesh. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law questioned that. And so only to prove that he had that authority on earth, does Jesus then go on to heal the man of whatever it was that was causing him not to be able to walk. And the man picks up his mat and he praises God. And he's reunited with his friends and they go out praising God together. And those in the room praise God too. And it's a wonderful story because what we see in that story is Jesus seeing this person as a person first.

Seeing past his disability and seeing the person and his heart and reaching him. Reaching him despite any disability that he may have. And seeing that this is somebody who needs Jesus, who has hope in Jesus, who has faith in Jesus and can be touched by Jesus and forgiven. And that brings us on to the story of the building blocks. Because some of you may have heard of a Christian festival that happens every year around Easter time called Spring Harvest. I think the nearest one to here is probably in Skegness. I don't know if any of you have ever been. But I each year go to the Spring Harvest festival in Minehead down in Somerset in the south west. A bit nearer to where I am based down in Bournemouth. And my role there is to look after all the provision for folk with additional support needs and disabilities across that particular week. And that involves me going around a couple of times a day to see the children's work and youth work in its various forms and to check in to make sure that all is working well. And on this particular day I arrived at the children's work for the older children, sort of 8 to 11 year olds. And as I went in I saw a young lad called Jack. Now Jack's autistic and has some other additional needs as well. And I saw him sat on the floor with a pile of

[10:05] Jenga building, Jenga blocks, wooden blocks, building a tower. And he would build this tower six or seven blocks high and it would fall over and then he would start again. And I went and sat next to him and I got a little glance out of the corner of his eye and he built his tower again and then it fell over and it fell towards me. And so I helped to gather up the blocks. And bit by bit he allowed me into his world and into this activity that he was doing. And we learned that together if we built the tower working as a team we could make it much higher. And we made a tower that was 20, 25 blocks high before it would fall. And now when it fell it made a crash. And Jack laughed and he had a wonderful belly laugh. You see Jack was non-verbal. He didn't really speak. But he expressed himself through his laughter and the fun that he was having. Now I stayed with Jack far too long. I ignored and neglected my other duties and I spent much longer with Jack than really I should have done. But eventually I had to carry on with my duties. And as I left I saw Jack building his little stack of bricks again. Six, seven, maybe eight high and then it would fall. And this time there was no belly laugh.

And my heart broke. My heart broke. And I thought what are we doing here? Are we reaching Jack at all with the gospel messages there? Anything that we're doing whilst he's with us in this session

that's touching him with the love of Jesus? Are we just childminding him? Is that all that we're managing?

But then about a week after Spring Harvest had finished, I heard from the Spring Harvest team about what had happened on Jack's journey home. Because as Jack and his family were travelling home, Jack was sat in the back of the car and he started to sing. And Jack sang three words from one of the worship songs that they had been using during the sessions that he'd been there. And the worship song that they'd been using a lot was Cornerstone. And Jack, this non-verbal boy, was singing over and over again, weak made strong. Weak made strong. Why did I doubt? God was at work in Jack's life. The Holy Spirit was ministering to Jack. God was seeing past Jack's disabilities, his autism and the other things that meant that he couldn't speak. And Jack was touching his heart, and God was touching Jack's heart in a very real and special way. Just as Jesus reached out to the man who couldn't walk, so 2,000 years later, he was reaching out to Jack as well and teaching us through that, never to underestimate the power of God to reach anyone with the gospel message, the good news of Jesus Christ. And as we think of anyone that can be reached with the message of Jesus, perhaps that leads us on to our next person that Jesus encountered. I did have some slides, but they don't seem to have arrived on the screen. Ah, they have arrived on the screen. Let me just see if I can move us on to our next story, which is the story of Bartimaeus. Now, I talked a little bit about

Bartimaeus yesterday. Some of you that were there yesterday will have heard me as I shared about this man who Jesus encountered on the way to Jericho. Jesus was going with the disciples on the Jericho road, and it was a path that he trod many times. He'd have seen Bartimaeus begging at the side of the road time and time again. And as Jesus passed on this occasion with all of his followers, so Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus. He said, Jesus, he said, Son of David, have mercy on me. Son of David, have mercy on me. And the people tried to shut Bartimaeus up. They told him not to disturb Jesus.

But the more they tried to shut Bartimaeus up, the more he shouted out, Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus heard Bartimaeus and asked Bartimaeus to come before him.

[14:41] And again, the crowd gathered round. Jesus had been going around healing people. And once again, the people gathered around expecting to see another miraculous healing. But once again, Jesus did the unexpected. He didn't just go and heal Bartimaeus. He did something else extraordinary first. He asked Bartimaeus a question. He said, what would you have me do for you?

What would you have me do for you? Now, Jesus, as a man, had seen Bartimaeus many times. He knew he was blind. As God made flesh, he knew what Bartimaeus wanted from him. But he gave Bartimaeus the dignity of asking what it was that he had come before Jesus for. Of course, Bartimaeus said, I want to see.

And then Jesus did indeed heal him and gave him his sight back. But in asking Bartimaeus that question, Jesus teaches us another lesson. Never to assume, never to believe that we know what somebody with a disability or additional support needs might need, but to ask them, to include them, and to involve them in that discussion. Which brings us on to the story of the bank. So a couple of years ago now, I needed to go to the local bank in Bournemouth, our branch of Santander Bank. I had a check that I needed to pay in. And I thought I'd take James, my 17-year-old, 15-year-old as he was then, son who's autistic, has a learning disability and epilepsy. I thought I'd take James with me.

And so James got in the car too, and we went to the bank, and we parked just down the road from the branch and walked together to the hole-in-the-wall machine outside, because you can pay checks in there. And so rather than go into the bank, it looked as though there was a bit of a queue. I thought, we'll use the hole-in-the-wall machine. And so I paid the check-in, and as everything was done, and I'd taken my receipt, and I said to James, who's also mostly non-verbal as well, a bit like Jack, I said to James, okay, it's time to go back to the car now. And as I turned and expected James to turn with me, James didn't turn with me. He dashed in through the front doors of the bank.

[17:17] And then he ran through the bank, past all the queue of customers that were waiting there, and through into the offices at the back of the bank. And he went into the office there, and he sat in a chair at a table in a little meeting room at the back of the branch. And I'm chasing after him in hot pursuit. Two or three of the Santander staff are following on as well, wondering what on earth is going on. And we arrived all together in this room, and there's James sat in this chair. And I was saying to James, come on James, we can't stay here, we need to go back to the car. But James

wasn't going to budge. And I tried everything I could think of to coax James to come with me, but nothing was working. And then I remembered that we'd been to that branch about six months before to open a new bank account. And we'd taken James with us, and we'd actually gone into that very office six months before. And James had done brilliantly, and he'd sat there and waited for the meeting to happen. And just as a little token of appreciation, the person we'd been meeting with from Santander had given James one of their little red promotional torches. And James had loved this little red torch. He'd really enjoyed using it. But, you know, it had had a tough six months, and it wasn't working anymore. And James had recognised where we were, and had dashed back into that same place. He wanted another little red torch. But Santander's promotions had moved on. They weren't giving little red torches away anymore. And there was James sat in this office, and a bunch of Santander staff are there. And it could have been quite an awkward situation. They could have been quite funny about the fact that we'd burst into their offices, and were sat there. But they were wonderful. And they used a similar phrase to the one that Jesus used of Artemis. They said, what can we do to help you? What do you need right now? What can we do to help you? And realising what James wanted, I said, well, we could do with trying to find a little red torch. And they turned the place upside down. There was a guy that disappeared inside a cupboard, pulling out everything that they could find. There were staff looking and searching around everywhere. And then out of this cupboard, this guy sort of reversed out, triumphantly holding a little red torch in his hand. And he gave it to James. And James switched it on, and it lit up. And immediately he jumped up out of his chair, and off we were going out of the branch of Santander. He had his little red torch.

The Santander staff had said, what can I do to help you? Jesus said, what would you have me do for you? It's a great learning for us as church to use as well. What can we do to help you? What can we do to serve you?

The third person that we can think of as meeting is a man who Jesus healed from leprosy. Now, Jesus met lots of people and healed lots of people. But one of them he met was this guy who had leprosy, who was outcast in the in the village, was not allowed into the village. Lepers weren't permitted to come in with everybody else. And Jesus went out and met this man and saw this man's faith and reached into this man's life and touched him. You didn't touch people with leprosy. It was absolutely the last thing that you did. But Jesus broke all the rules. Jesus broke all the rules. And he reached this man and he touched him.

And he healed him. But he healed him physically. But he also healed him emotionally and mentally as well by reaching out and touching him. There was healing there that was an incredible thing for that man. Now, I told the story yesterday of a boy and his mum that came to our church in Bournemouth a couple of years or so ago, a boy called Martin. And it was a club night. And I was on the door greeting the children and young people as they were arriving at our church. And Martin and his mum were coming down the path towards me. And I didn't recognize them. I'd never seen them in our church or in the community around. And as they arrived with me, mum said to me, this club that you run, is it just for church kids? Or can anybody come along? And I said, no, it's open to all. And I started explaining a bit about what we did and our timings and all of that. And I could see that mum was building herself up to something more. And suddenly out it comes. And she says, honey, Martin has ADHD, which is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which is common amongst a lot of children and young people.

About one in 10 children and young people have ADHD to some extent. Only in Martin's case, this often caused him to struggle with his behaviour. And his mum had tried to get him into other clubs, into other groups, but they'd always said no. And this is where the health and safety story comes in. [ 22 : 54 ] Because amongst the things that had been told to this mum was, no, Martin can't come here because we haven't got enough volunteers. No, Martin can't come here because our volunteers haven't got the right training in working with children with additional support needs. Or on one occasion, I'm sorry, Martin won't be able to come here because he might be a health and safety risk for the other children. Breaks your heart, doesn't it? And as mum was sharing these stories with me, 90% of my attention was wrapped up with what she was saying. And the other 10% was horribly distracted by the chaos that was going on in the room behind me. Kids climbing the walls, screams coming from some of them, wondering where the rest of the team were that were supposed to be organising some activities for them. And as there was one blood-curdling scream, and I truly believed that somebody had indeed just died, and was just wondering who it might be, and contemplating all the paperwork that was now going to be necessary. And as I was looking

back to see what was going on, mum asked, would Martin be able to come here? So no pressure then. But as I looked at what was going on behind me, I saw several other young people, all of whom had ADHD or autism, or in one case, a combination of both, which is an exciting cocktail for him and sometimes for us as well, but a brilliant lad. But I really sensed God whispering in my ear and saying, there's room for one more, you know. There's room for one more. And I looked back at Martin and his mum, and I said, you know, we would love for Martin to be a part of our group. And as you can see, he'll fit right in. And she laughed. And as she laughed, I saw healing come to her. I saw a light come into her eyes. I saw a weight lifted from her shoulders. And just as Jesus had not just healed the guy with leprosy of his physical disability, but also of his emotional and mental scars too.

So in a small way, just saying yes to Martin's mum healed something in her, healed something emotionally and mentally in her as well. Saying yes, so important, including everyone as Jesus did, so powerful, such an important thing for us to do. The final person we're going to think about that Jesus met is a woman that Jesus met who had a condition which meant that she would bleed. And as a result of this condition, she was finding herself on the edges of society. She was considered ritually unclean and so would not have been able to have gone to the temple to join in with the worship there. And as Jesus and all his followers were going by one day, this woman reached out and touched Jesus' cloak in faith and hope that even just touching his cloak might transform her physically. And it did. And she was healed. And Jesus stopped. And he knew that power had gone out of him.

Something had happened. And he turned around and he said, who touched me? Who touched me? And everybody was looking around and saying, Lord, there's people jostling around all the time. Everybody's been bumping into each other. How can you say who touched me? But Jesus knew something significant had happened. He said, no, somebody touched me. Somebody touched me differently.

[ 26 : 42 ] Who is it? And eventually this woman, trembling, came out before Jesus and explained who she was and told her story. And at first glance, that might seem quite cruel to us. We might think, why did Jesus do that? Why did Jesus make her come out and stand there, a woman who'd been on the margins of society and tell her story like that? Well, it was because of this. If she'd just gone away, having been healed by touching Jesus' cloak, who would have believed her? Would she have remained on the margins of society? Would she have been able to come into the temple and worship? But by drawing her out and asking her to share her story, Jesus was able to declare her healed. Jesus, the teacher, was able to include her back into society, to make it possible for her to go to the temple once again.

I showed a little video clip yesterday of a friend of mine, Philippa. Philippa was born blind. And she shares how in her home church, she's really welcomed. She belongs. She's part of that community. She's part of that family. But when she goes somewhere else, perhaps on holiday or visiting, often it's a very different story. She'll go into churches and they won't even say hello to her. People seem nervous to engage with her. They don't know what to say or what to do. And so she feels isolated. She feels on the edges of things. She doesn't feel that she belongs or is welcomed in any way.

Just as Jesus included this woman back into her community and was able to declare her able to be actively involved in all that was going on. So for disabled people, people with additional needs and disability, to welcome them, to just say hello, to include them in the things that we're doing in our church is so powerful, so important. And we looked yesterday at lots of ways to enable that to happen.

I showed another little video clip yesterday, which we're going to look at again today because many of you won't have seen it. It's a bunch of folk with a range of different additional needs and disabilities, all sharing the Apostles' Creed together, all declaring their faith in God in different ways and using different ways of communicating. But it's beautifully inclusive and perhaps is a great way of summing up the message that we've been looking at over this weekend. So we're going to show this message now. I particularly like the Pontius Pilate kid that you'll see in this video.

[ 29 : 35 ] You'll see what I mean when we get to him. But hopefully we can get that video to run now. And we're going to tell the fact that if we do not know about what we're doing in the relationship it, we'll be able to be able to be Shall we go?

And hopefully we'll try to respond to this video there sounds, but hopefully it's either like it says we've never felt so meaningful. So I should prefer the meeting by going on high down and down, inside of here we hope we go!

I look. I be God. I go with my teeth.

I give it to Jesus Christ. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Born with Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He sent him.

[ 30 : 57 ] He sent him. He sent him. He sent him. And completed by the right hand of God. The Father Almighty.

The Holy Spirit. I believe. I believe. I believe. I believe. I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Oh, God. The Lord. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. The right direction of the body, the light that we bless you. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 31 : 57 ] Amen. Good, isn't it? Wonderful way of just, yeah, perhaps bringing together some of the thoughts that we've been looking at over the weekend. So we're going to pray in a moment and then we'll sing again.

But before we pray, as we go on from here and as you as the church here just work through some of the stuff that we've been looking at over the weekend.

Remember those people that Jesus encountered. Remember the man lowered through the roof.

Remember Bartimaeus, the guy that was healed of leprosy, the woman who was healed of bleeding.

And remember those other stories that I shared with you. Remember Jack, the boy with the building blocks. Remember James with his little red torch. Remember all the things that we looked at about Martin and how he could be included and how his mum was healed through that experience.

And also a Philippa, our friend who was born blind and just wants somebody to say hello when she arrives at church. Much for us to carry forward from what we've looked at over this weekend.

[ 33 : 13 ] But let's pray and then we'll sing again. Lord, we are just so thankful to you for leading us and showing us by your example how we should just be with everybody that we meet.

How you reached out to people and saw them as people first. Saw their faith, saw their heart and that was the most important thing for you.

How you would ask those important questions. What would you have me do for you? And in saying that, teaching us to do the same thing today.

That you were not afraid of disability but you would touch those that nobody else would. And in doing so, heal them physically but also heal them emotionally and mentally as well.

And how you would include everyone in their society and in their culture and help everyone to belong. And how you long for us to do the same today.

[ 34 : 20 ] To make sure that everybody is able to gather together in your name and hear the gospel and respond to it in wonderful ways.

And we thank you for the stories that we've heard of Jack and of James and of Martin and of Philippa that have perhaps just enabled us to think of those stories that we've heard in different ways.

Help us as we take all this forward to seek you to ask you for the right things to say the right things to do the right way to be. And to just look for the way that you interacted with everyone that you met including so many people with additional support needs and disabilities.

And to copy your great example. Bless us now as we continue in our time together. In Jesus' name. Amen.