

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
7th Sunday after Epiphany
Sunday, February 23, 2025
Scripture: Luke 5: 27-32
Sermon: Welcome to the Hospital

There is a saying: the Church is a hospital! It is a place for broken, hurt and lost people to come. The church should be a place for people to feel safe to come in as they are and not feel like they have to put a mask on and pretend to be someone else. But the thing about a church being a hospital is that we need to step back and think, “What is a hospital?”

In a hospital there are people who are hurt, sick and broken. But there are also doctors, medicine, and things to help the people leave feeling better, healed, restored, or in some kind of direction for change. It is not that the hospital building has some kind of magical source that heals people. It has the people and the resources to help people who are sick or hurting.

The church as a hospital calls to mind images of people who are unwell but want to get better—people who acknowledge their sickness, are humbled by it, and have placed themselves in the hands of others who might help them.

Closely related to the word “hospital”, is the word “hospitality”. The root of both is the Latin noun “*hospes*”, meaning “one who provides lodging or entertainment for a guest or visitor.”

Hospitals provide hospitality to the sick so that they might become healthy and whole. And that is exactly what God calls us to do.

The Church as a hospital for the unwell. Both the Old and New Testaments command those who belong to the Lord to generously provide hospitality. And not only are we to practice hospitality, but we are to do so in a way that, if necessary, administers aid and care to the sick.

The prophet Isaiah says true fasting is “to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter” (Isaiah 58:7).

While in the home of a prominent Pharisee, Jesus commands, “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:13-14). And the apostle Peter urges the church to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

Jesus’ mission was one of rescue and healing and it’s one that you and I and the whole world need, no matter how materially comfortable we are.

Over and over the Bible commands the church to open wide our doors to the hungry, the poor, the wanderer, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and to one another. What we might easily dismiss or forget, though, is that we, the church, are the hungry, the poor, the wanderer, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

When the teachers of the law, the Pharisees, saw Jesus eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Luke 5: 27-32)

We who gather in church are the sick in need of a doctor. We are the sinners in need of a Savior.

To be sure, by God’s immeasurable love and grace, we who are in Christ are redeemed. We are now new creations, and the Holy Spirit lives inside of us, but we have not yet reached perfection. We still wage war against our own flesh. We will not be without sin until we reach heaven. We are still in need of, even as we are required to give, the hospitality of a hospital. And praise God, that is exactly what Jesus’ mission provides for us.

So what does that mean for the church? The church is not just for the sick to come and stay sick. It is not a place where people can come and stay broken. It should be a place for transformation, healing, restoration and salvation, just like Jesus did. Let’s pull off the masks and facades that we put up to impress other people and be real, be broken, be hurt, and be honest.

The church should have people who are willing to walk with others who have been broken and injured and be there for them during the difficult times. We all have had brokenness in our lives, and we all need healing at some point in our life. We all need Jesus! We all need healing! We all need to go to the hospital to find healing. Many avoid the hospital, the church, because they think they need to be perfect to come in.

Christ came to take away the sins of the world, not let us sit in them. He came to set captives free, not let them stay in their captivity. A hospital, a church, should see people being saved, healed, delivered, and transformed by the Spirit of God.

The church should be a safe place for the lost, hurting, sick and injured. The church is a place for sinners to be forgiven and to be made into new creations. The church is a hospital because it is here we find God's peace as we pray with and for each other and where we study the word of God together. The church is full of people with the Spirit of God working through them to set people free, find healing, deliverance, and see Jesus as Lord of their life.

I believe the church should be a hospital, where Jesus is our master physician. It should be a place where those who are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually wounded can come. It is a place where we should be able to check in and begin our healing and on the road to recovery. The church should be a place where those who are lost are found and can have a seat in the house of God.

It is my prayer that the house of God will become a hospital: a place where someone can be loved back to life with the love of God. I pray that the church will be a place of healing and not a place of hurt. Jesus' mission was one of rescue and healing.

The sickness is sin, but the cure is Jesus Christ. He is the ONLY cure for sin. In Christ we have the cure for the virus of sin!

It is grace. Grace is a free gift. It's like when we receive something that we don't deserve. It's like a teacher giving you an extra week for your submission deadline. He didn't have to do it, but he is showing you grace. Grace is something that you don't deserve, and you don't work for; it is all about the graciousness of the giver who has chosen to give you this free gift.

Grace is the key to understanding our healing in a world of brokenness.

Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Paul writes in Ephesians 2: 4-5, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

The cure for the sickness of sin is Jesus Christ the Son of God. And how do we receive this cure?

By believing in Jesus Christ. That is the only way to be saved from sin. Not by living a morally upright life. Not by good works. Not by any other way but faith in Jesus Christ – The Way, the Truth and the Life. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most respected leaders of modern history. Despite being a Hindu, Gandhi admired Jesus and often quoted from the Sermon on the Mount.

Gandhi’s rejection of Christianity grew out of an incident that happened when he was a young man practicing Law in South Africa. After studying the Bible and teachings of Jesus, he was attracted to the Christian faith and seriously explored becoming a Christian.

He decided to attend a church service. As he went up to the steps of a large South African Church, an elder barred his way at the door.

“Where do you think you’re going, kaffir?” the elder asked.

Gandhi replied, “I’d like to attend worship here.”

The church elder snarled at him, “There’s no room for kaffirs (not a nice word in South Africa for people of color) in this church. Get out of here, or I’ll have my assistants throw you down the steps.”

From that moment, Gandhi decided to adopt what good he found in Christianity, but he never again considered becoming a Christian if it meant being part of the church.

Once when the missionary E. Stanley Jones met with Gandhi he asked him, “Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?”

Gandhi replied, "Oh, I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It's just that so many of your Christians are so unlike your Christ."
(storiesforpreaching.com)

One of the Church's greatest problems is poorly representing the Christ we profess to serve. Our judgmental attitudes towards others, while we have sin in our own lives, is clearly seen and turns people away.

The Church is supposed to be a hospital for sinners. The gatekeepers of the church should be humble representatives of the faith, with the understanding that faith is a journey and not a destination in this lifetime. We are always a work in progress. If we act as if we have arrived, when it's obvious that we haven't, people who struggle with basic issues of faith will struggle to come to faith in God.

There is a song that contemporary Christian singer Matthew West sings called, Truth Be Told. Listen to the words that are a prayer to God. The song talks to us about the church as a hospital and coming to church as you are, needing healing, hope and forgiveness. So many people come to church saying, "I am fine." But we aren't. We need a Savior. We need forgiveness, and healing and new life in Christ. (Song by Carly Pearce and Matthew West · 2021)

"Lie number one you're supposed to have it all together
And when they ask how you're doing
Just smile and tell them, "Never better"
Lie number 2 everybody's life is perfect except yours
So keep your messes and your wounds
And your secrets safe with you behind closed doors
Truth be told
The truth is rarely told, now
I say I'm fine, but I'm not
I'm broken
And when it's out of control I say it's under control but it's not
And you know it
I don't know why it's so hard to admit it
When being honest is the only way to fix it

There's no failure, no fall
There's no sin you don't already know
So let the truth be told
There's a sign on the door, says, "Come as you are" but I doubt it
'Cause if we lived like it was true, every Sunday morning pew
would be crowded
But didn't you say the church should look more like a hospital
A safe place for the sick, the sinner and the scarred and the
prodigals
Like me
Well truth be told
The truth is rarely told
Oh am I the only one who says
I'm fine, but I'm not
I'm broken
And when it's out of control I say it's under control but it's not
And you know it
I don't know why it's so hard to admit it
When being honest is the only way to fix it
There's no failure, no fall
There's no sin you don't already know
So let the truth be told
Can I really stand here unashamed
Knowin' that your love for me won't change?
Oh God if that's really true
Then let the truth be told"

Christ came to call the lost to repentance and salvation through His death and resurrection. The local church isn't a place to go when you have it all figured out. The church is a place to go for healing and forgiveness. Jesus came to be with broken, hurting, flawed, sinful people. That is who he loved, so much so that he desired to spend time with such people every

single day. Jesus came to be with sinners, to walk right up to them, and say, "I want you to come follow me."

Welcome to the hospital so you can be made well!