

August 7, 2022
I'm not OK. You're not OK. But that's OK.
Luke 5:1-16

Phil spent five years in prison for fraud. When he had served his sentence, he went looking for a job. If he had gone back to his old employer, do you think he would get his job back? What do you think happened when Phil went to any employer? He felt untouchable.

Now imagine someone in the 1st century who has a horrible, highly infectious skin disease. Everyone in his little village knows his body is filled with it. He has been banished; he lives in a hut out of town. His family leave food for him outside town but stay well clear when he collects it. He has no friends. No one talks with him. He is totally isolated. Alone.

The untouchable (Luke 5:12-16)

A man is covered in leprosy. Let's give him a name. Names matter. As long as a person is just "that guy," they remain impersonal. We can criticize them. Ignore them. They are just a generic person who means nothing to us.

When we meet someone and ask, remember, and call them by their name, everything changes. They are no longer a nameless, faceless, anonymous, generic person. They are "Frieda," "Fred," "Alphonse," or "Evie." When someone meets us, it feels great when they remember our name. Our name is a very personal, fundamental part of who we are. So let's give this man a name. Let's humanize him. Back in the day, I had a good Jewish friend named Shlomo, so, in deference to my friend, Shlomo, let's name this man, Shlomo.

In a world before modern medicine, people with diseases like leprosy were subject to strict regulations. The ancient Jewish purity laws we read in the Old Testament were not designed to make life difficult for sick people. They were necessary to stop the spread of disease. Having just been through Covid, with all its public health orders, we can understand this more now than ever.

Shlomo has to live outside the community. He is never allowed to be in town. Shlomo is so desperate that this day he breaks the law. He comes to see Jesus. Jesus ought not speak to a lawbreaker. He should turn a leper away. Shlomo says, "*Lord, if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean*" (5:12). Notice, Shlomo isn't doubting Jesus' ability and power to make him clean. He is questioning whether Jesus is WILLING to heal him and make him clean. Jesus has the power to heal Shlomo? Will he heal such a vile person?

"*I am willing,*" Jesus said. "*Be healed!*" (5:13). Not only is Jesus able to help a leper; He is willing to help a leper. More astounding, Jesus "*reached out and touched him*" (5:13). This is inconceivable. This touch makes Jesus "unclean" according to Jewish law.

Nobody has touched Shlomo for years. Jesus reaches out his hand and touches him. It's unbelievable. It's a miracle. It's love. It's God in action.

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Jesus touches someone who is untouchable. With that simple act of kindness, Jesus gives love to someone whom everyone else felt was unlovable. He gives hope to a person who felt hopeless. He gave life to a person as good as dead.

Where do you fit?

Where do you fit in this story? **Maybe you feel a bit like Shlomo** ... For some reason you feel a bit like an “untouchable.” Maybe there’s something in your past or something in your present. Maybe you wrestle with an addiction, a vice, a demon. Maybe you’ve lost a loved one. Maybe you just feel untouchable because you feel alone.

Mike Davis, a Christian author, has a comedy video (in our library) called *"I'm not Okay."* His whole premise is this: *"I'm not Okay. You're not Okay. But that's okay because God loves us where we are."* That's the good news ...

Think about some of these examples:

- Think about Peter. Peter is a frustrated fisherman. He has been out all night and not caught anything. Jesus doesn't leave Peter in that place ... he invites him on a journey, to change his whole way of life and walk with Him.
- Jesus doesn't leave Shlomo an untouchable: He touches him. He gives him new life.
- FYI, Jesus didn't leave Phil where he was either. Phil's wife had left him. His family wouldn't speak to him. Jesus found Phil. Like many people, the door through which Jesus found Phil was Alcoholics Anonymous. The 12 Steps of AA are not perfect – they are not the Bible – but for many people they can be helpful. The 12 steps are for people who are not OK ... whether your not-OK-ness is alcohol, drugs, or just regularly blowing it. I need help in my brokenness, too.

One of the principles of AA is that we admit we are powerless over our issue (alcohol, or whatever else), that our lives have become unmanageable. We need help. We need a Power greater than ourselves who can help us overcome our addictions, make the changes we need, and restore us.

One of the principles of the Good News of Jesus is being able to admit that we're not OK, our lives are unmanageable, we need help. We, the people of God, know WHO the higher Power really is – Jesus. He meets us where we are. Only He can help us overcome our issues – whatever those issues are – and make the changes we need in our lives. We make the

decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God. Jesus helps us make the changes we need to restore us to who He created us to be.

In biblical terms, this decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, is called repentance. We put our faith in Jesus, as the One who can change our lives, and then we trust Him to make the changes that need to be made. Then we ACT on those changes.

Jesus met Peter where he was. He met Shlomo where he was. He met Phil where he was. He helped them all to change. AND they actually changed the direction of their lives.

Jesus meets us where we are. We hear come to Him, in faith. He will help us to change, **IF** we are willing to trust Him, follow Him, AND put His truth into practice ...

Jesus can help us change. That's why we read Scripture. That's why we pray. That's why we're part of a Christian community (church). All these things are ways God helps us deal with issues in the past, change our lives in the present, and move forward into a new future.

In Phil's case, after years of walking with Jesus, the support of Christian friends and AA, he did pay off his creditors, he did rebuild his marriage, and he did restore relationships with his family. Phil will always carry scars from his past, but Jesus helps him live in the present ... Phil will admit that God did that, through His grace, as he gave his life to Jesus, learned from Jesus, puts his faith in Jesus, **AND** put Jesus' principles into practice.

This can be a LONG process. Simply putting our faith in Jesus is not a miracle pill that instantly changes the circumstances of our lives. We would love it if it were. Putting our faith in Jesus does set in motion a process that changes our hearts, our minds, our souls, AND, over time, changes everything else. Phil did not become a saint overnight. He still struggles with various issues. But he is moving in the right direction. Will he ever be perfect? No. Can he keep on trying to be more and more like Jesus? Absolutely.

Don't let your not-OK-ness define who you are. Don't let it limit you. It's easy to let issues from our past or our present define us and control us. For instance, the past 2+ years have been by far the toughest for me as a pastor. I can let the exhaustion, frustration, and stress take over my life. Or, I can be honest about how tough the past 28 months have been. Yes, they have been incredibly tough for all of us, in all sorts of ways. We can wallow in that. Or, we can turn the past over to God and ask Him to deal with it. We can ask Jesus to help us move forward. What happens next is what matters most.

The past does not need to define us. Ys, some things have died. Some things have changed. But we believe in a God of resurrection. We believe in a Saviour who brings new life. We believe God can make all things new – in our lives and in our church. I CHOOSE to believe the Spirit can bring the power of the resurrection into our lives and our church, so the future can be better than we ever dreamed of.

All of us are a bit like Shlomo (and Phil) – none of us is perfectly OK. But we also live in a world of Shlomos and Phils. **You DO know a lot of Shlomos.** We are surrounded by

people who are not OK – in all sorts of ways. No one is OK. We live in a lonely world, full of lots of lonely people. Plenty of people in our community need the touch of Jesus – literally and metaphorically. One of the saddest songs of all time is the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby":

"Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been, Lives in a dream, Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door, Who is it for? All the lonely people, Where do they all come from? All the lonely people, Where do they all belong?"

Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear; No one comes near. Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there; What does he care? All the lonely people; Where do they all come from? All the lonely people; Where do they all belong?"

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I'm not OK. You're not OK. But that's OK.
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Jesus can help us change. That's why we read Scripture. That's why we pray. That's why we're part of a Christian community (church). All these things are ways God helps us deal with issues in the past, change our lives in the present, and move forward into a new future.

In Phil's case, after years of walking with Jesus, the support of Christian friends and AA, he did pay off his creditors, he did rebuild his marriage, and he did restore relationships with his family. Phil will always carry scars from his past, but Jesus helps him live in the present ... Phil will admit that God did that, through His grace, as he gave his life to Jesus, learned from Jesus, puts his faith in Jesus, **AND** put Jesus' principles into practice.

This can be a LONG process. Simply putting our faith in Jesus is not a miracle pill that instantly changes the circumstances of our lives. We would love it if it were. Putting our faith in Jesus does set in motion a process that changes our hearts, our minds, our souls, AND, over time, changes everything else. Phil did not become a saint overnight. He still struggles with various issues. But he is moving in the right direction. Will he ever be perfect? No. Can he keep on trying to be more and more like Jesus? Absolutely.

Don't let your not-OK-ness define who you are. Don't let it limit you. It's easy to let issues from our past or our present define us and control us. For instance, the past 2+ years have been by far the toughest for me as a pastor. I can let the exhaustion, frustration, and stress take over my life. Or, I can be honest about how tough the past 28 months have been. Yes, they have been incredibly tough for all of us, in all sorts of ways. We can wallow in that. Or, we can turn the past over to God and ask Him to deal with it. We can ask Jesus to help us move forward. What happens next is what matters most.

The past does not need to define us. Ys, some things have died. Some things have changed. But we believe in a God of resurrection. We believe in a Saviour who brings new life. We believe God can make all things new – in our lives and in our church. I CHOOSE to believe the Spirit can bring the power of the resurrection into our lives and our church, so the future can be better than we ever dreamed of.

All of us are a bit like Shlomo (and Phil) – none of us is perfectly OK. But we also live in a world of Shlomos and Phils. **You DO know a lot of Shlomos.** We are surrounded by

people who are not OK – in all sorts of ways. No one is OK. We live in a lonely world, full of lots of lonely people. Plenty of people in our community need the touch of Jesus – literally and metaphorically. One of the saddest songs of all time is the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby":

"Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been, Lives in a dream, Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door, Who is it for? All the lonely people, Where do they all come from? All the lonely people, Where do they all belong?"

Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear; No one comes near. Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there; What does he care? All the lonely people; Where do they all come from? All the lonely people; Where do they all belong?"

Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name, Nobody came. Father McKenzie wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave, No one was saved. All the lonely people, Where do they all come from? All the lonely people, Where do they all belong?" (Isn't it sad, when the Beatles wrote about loneliness, they wrote about church?)

We may not be all OK yet, but Jesus' invitation to us is that, in a world of people who are not OK either, we can reach out and make a difference in the life of another person. Someone out here needs you. We all need friends. We all need one another. One person may need a hug. Another person may need a phone call. Someone else may need an invitation to come along on your next social event. He may need a ride to the doctor's office. She may need some help finding a job. They may just need a smile.

Jesus could have – should have – avoided Shlomo (I'm sure in His day-timer He had plenty of other, very important things He could and should be doing). Certainly the Jewish powers-that-be knew that, according to their Bibles, Jesus should NOT speak with Shlomo, let alone touch him. But Jesus stopped. He cared. He made a difference in one person's life. That made a world of difference to one person – to one town.

We're all a bit like Shlomo, but we're also all called to be like Jesus, too. We are to *"Imitate God in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God"* (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Note the little footnote to the story of Shlomo: Jesus *"often withdrew ... for prayer"* (5:16). Jesus prayed! If Jesus prayed, then surely we should pray – often! When we pray, we put our lives in the hands of our loving, saving, all-gracious, all-powerful God, the God of the resurrection. We turn our lives over to Him. We listen to Him. We follow Him.