

Visiting Those in Need

Luke 19:1-10 & 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Let me open my sermon by asking these questions: Have you ever visited someone in need? If so, what did you do during that visit? Do you believe that God is calling His people to walk alongside those who are spiritually, emotionally, and physically in need? Do you think we need this type of ministry?"

Today, we are going to explore one of the means of grace we are to carry out to strengthen both others and ourselves as we take a journey of faith together, visiting those in need.

Let us read the Scripture on the screen together.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV)

The Greek word for “comfort” is *parakaleo*, a compound of *para* (“beside”) and *kaleo* (“call”). In John 14:16, the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate, a translation of the Greek word *paracletos*, which can also be rendered as “Comforter” or “Encourager.” *Parakaleo* and *paracletos* share the same root. Therefore, our comfort for others is an extension of the Holy Spirit’s work. He works through us to bring His comfort and encouragement to those in need.

Based on 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, we can define today’s means of grace as this: **“Visitation, as a means of grace, is a fitting response to God’s loving care and comfort toward us. It is through this ministry that God works through His servants to extend His compassion and solace to those in spiritual, emotional, and physical distress, affliction, or need. In this act, we, as God’s servants, not only offer comfort but also experience His presence among those in their suffering or in need, becoming vessels of His love and peace.”**

Today’s Scriptures from Luke 19 provide us with some insights into today’s means of grace, **Visiting Those in Need**, as we follow the model of Jesus’ visitation.

First, God is always with the helpless, the marginalized, and the lowly.

“He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.” (Luke 19:1-2 NRSV)

At that time, Jesus realized the time had come to fulfill his destiny of being crucified on the cross in Jerusalem. He knew that he was nearing his final days before his crucifixion. So, he started his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51 NRSV)

When he passed through Jericho, he met Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector longing to meet Jesus Christ. Tax collectors were the most hated people in Israel, excluded from all religious activities and social relationships. They didn't belong in Israel. It was because they excessively and unjustly levied taxes on their own people as representatives of the Roman Empire. As a result, they were regarded as traitors and treated as foreigners. Jericho was a wealthy and prominent city, an important trade center, and a hub for tax collection. In a city of wealth and fame, there was a rich person who was an outcast, lonely, and unaccepted. However, we have to remember that God is always with the brokenhearted.

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18 NRSV)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:3-4 NRSV)

Let us remember what Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19:5 NRSV)

Secondly, there are always barriers.

“He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.” (Luke 19:3-4 NRSV)

There are always barriers that we have to overcome to reveal Christ's loving care and comfort. The crowd was a barrier between Zacchaeus and Jesus Christ, preventing Zacchaeus from experiencing Christ's loving care and comfort. Their indifference and disregard for Zacchaeus and his needs were the realities he had to overcome to meet Jesus Christ.

Even when Jesus chose to stay in Zacchaeus' house, Jesus was criticized for his companionship with Zacchaeus, the tax collector and the sinner.

“All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” (Luke 19:7 NRSV)

To the people in the community, Zacchaeus was not called by his name. He was called a sinner.

As we try to reflect Christ's loving care and comfort, we must remember that suffering is our calling.

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2:21 NRSV)

"For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well," (Philippians 1:29 NRSV)

Lastly, our visitations can be a part of God's salvation story.

"Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (Luke 19:8-10 NRSV)

We must believe that God is with us as we try to use this means of grace for those in need. Our visitations can serve as a powerful means to share the message of salvation, offering hope and spiritual renewal to those we visit. As we reach out to people, we must always remember that we are part of God's mission for their salvation. We need to trust in this process.

My father passed away from cancer in 2006. He had been hospitalized at the National Cancer Center, which was located two and a half hours away from my hometown, Chuncheon. Although he attended church with my mom, he did not have a strong faith in Christ. During his treatment at the hospital, he was told that he had about two more years to live. This news made him unhappy, and he struggled a lot due to the pain he had to endure.

One day, he was unexpectedly visited by his church members. They took a church bus from Chuncheon to see him. During this surprise visit, they sang hymns, prayed for him, and shared words of encouragement. All he could say was, "Thank you so much! Thank you so much!" I learned about this from my mom. After the very special visitation, his faith was strengthened and he was so grateful for their love, support, and care. When he was released from the hospital, he would sit alone in his study at home, reading the Bible and praying to God in tears.

I shared this story with my children so they understand what God has done for their grandpa and recognize they are also under God's special grace.

Many have disconnected from our church due to age or mobility issues. Despite being long-time members, we often only hear news about them when they pass away and ask their pastor to lead the funeral service. There are people who want to be heard, to share their burdens, and to be understood. Although there may be barriers, we are called to extend God's grace to them. In our visitations, we can discover God's special anointing of salvation and renewal for both those who visit and those who are visited. That is why visiting those in need is one of the means of grace. As we care for those who need our presence, we can grow and reflect Jesus Christ's presence. In our visits, we can experience God who is always with the helpless, the marginalized, and the lowly.