

## **Renewing Strength: When Life Shames Us**

**By Pastor Daniel Dennison**

**Luke 5:12-16**

**August 18, 2019**

Most schools in our city and across the state are starting this week. And there's just something about going back to school. We all want to put our best foot forward, right?

And it's not just students, It's true for us parents too am I right? I mean think about it, how many days of the school year do we put as much thought into our kids outfits and hair as we are currently doing for the first day of school this week? We've got our kids first day of school outfits picked out already and I'm sure we will get them up early and feed them breakfast and pose for pictures and casually strolled off to school arriving 15 minutes early. But by the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day I'll probably be yelling at my kids because we're running behind, they haven't brushed their hair or their teeth and I can't promise their clothes will match.

And it's not just with the start of school. It's the start of anything. A new job, a new relationship, a new business partnership. No matter what it is, to some degree, all of us try really hard to put our best foot forward at the start of anything new. It's just what we do, but here's the reality. Even when we're trying to be at our very best most of us are gonna have an embarrassing moment where we're trying to make a good impression, we're trying to network with the right people and make just the right impression, but we completely embarrass ourselves.

And what's the best thing to do when you do that stupid embarrassing thing? It's to talk about it, because that's how you diffuse the situation, you share it with people, because we've all been there and we can all laugh about it. As a parent I've had plenty of moments that bring feelings of shame and embarrassment upon me. I think that's just a part of being a parent.

Like 5 years ago when I did something really really dumb. We were going to be having a family gathering at my parents' place in East TX. My sister was

flying in from CA, my brother was driving up from Houston and we were going to have a long weekend together. Unfortunately Mindy couldn't get that Friday off from work and so I had the bright idea that I would drive 4 hours in the car with my 5 year old, 2 year old, and 1 year old and Mindy would just come on down on her own a day later.

And about 2 ½ hours into our journey, things were going great. The two little ones had slept most of the way and Ruthie had just watched a movie, but it was time for a bathroom break and some food. So I found a McDonalds and I pulled into the parking lot. Now before getting out of the car, I tried to make a mental game plan to figure out how I was going to get in and out of McDonalds with 3 kids without dying. So I had a diaper bag over one shoulder, I'm carrying Brick with my other arm, while trying to convince Ruthie to hold McKenna's hand as we walked into the store. And man you could just see the pity on people's faces when they saw me. People went out of their way to open the doors for me and they're like: after you man, you need this.

So we're all sitting down, the kids are eating great and I'm just knocking it out of the park as a single dad of 3. Now as we're finishing up I begin to realize that Brick had dirtied his diaper. So I gather up the diaper bag, I pick him up, I realize I probably shouldn't leave the kids by themselves, so I tell them to follow me into the guy's bathroom. I pull down the changing table and I'm doing my thing. Ruthie was upset that I made her go into the guy's bathroom. She kept telling me that she was a girl and not allowed and it got to the point where she was having a little minor meltdown and crying and laying on the bathroom floor. I'm yelling at her while changing a diaper and it was a bad one, it was the explosive kind where poop is coming out of the diaper, so I had to use a bunch of wet wipes and pack up his pants in a little baggie and find clean pants. And at this point the other guys in the bathroom I mean they are taking notice and it was really embarrassing. And that diaper, it required so many wet wipes that I ran out and so I head to the paper towel machine to come up with some wet paper towels. And that's when I notice out of the corner of my eye that McKenna is playing with one of the urinal cakes.

So let's talk about shame and embarrassment this morning. We've been in a sermon series called Renewing Strength where we are looking at some of the things that can beat us down in life and how Jesus can be our answer in the midst of all that. And today we're looking at that emotion of shame that can often hold many of us back from being who Christ has called us. Maybe you've never been in a McDonalds bathroom with one kid crying on the floor, one kid with poop on him, and another playing with a urinal cake. But we've all been in shameful situations and many times we can laugh about those things. But here's the reality today that I want to bring us around. We've all had embarrassing, and shameful things happen to us, but all of us if we're being honest have some embarrassing things about us. Things that bring us great shame. And those are less fun to talk about. And I'm not talking about silly, shallow things that we can laugh about. I'm talking about deep things about us where we say: I don't like this about me and I don't want people to know this about me.

For some of you, maybe it's something in your past. And you think: if these people knew this about me, they wouldn't want anything to do with me. Others of you, maybe it's some addictions and some habits that you're not very proud of and you would be mortified if people around you knew about those things. And this kind of embarrassment and shame is a lot less fun to talk about. And that's what I want to talk about this morning, because I think ALL of us deep within us have feelings of shame and humiliation.

And I think it's especially exasperated in today's culture. Where everyone is trying to get a leg up on others. And everyone is putting off this aura that they're not just ok, but they're the best, the smartest, the prettiest, the funniest. **(SLIDE)** When we only see picture perfect Instagram posts, and we only tweet about our accomplishments, we're left to compare ourselves to others and feel like we're the only ones with these shortcomings and shame. But the reality if we're all being honest today, is that we all have things in our lives that bring us shame.

And I want to talk with you about it this morning by showing you how Jesus arrived on the scene and how he interacted with people. In the Gospel of Luke, we get these incredible stories of Jesus going out and ministering to people one after another. In Luke 5, Jesus interacts with different people

who are at their worst moments. If you have your Bibles, I hope you will join me in chapter 5 because that's where we will be the rest of the morning. Chapter 5 is story after story of Jesus intersecting with people at their greatest level of brokenness. And I want us to look at some of these stories today, because I think the way Jesus interacts with these people in the midst of their shame, tells us exactly how he wants to interact with us in our shame.

**So in Luke 5 Jesus comes on the scene, he's preaching powerfully, he's doing miracles. And the crowds start gathering. And it becomes too much, so he jumps in Simon Peter's boat (5:3). And he begins preaching and teaching to the crowds from the boat. And after he finishes, he abruptly turns to Peter in v.4 and says, "hey, let's go catch some fish." He says this to him in front of the entire crowd and Peter has to respond in v.5 by saying (SLIDE), "I just fished all night, and I caught nothing."**

That's a pretty embarrassing thing for him to have to say. Peter, the fisherman, I mean that's how he would introduce himself. I'm Peter, I'm a fisherman. Now try doing that in front of a few thousand people after not being able to catch any fish. That's pretty humiliating. That's not a great moment for Peter. I think Jesus touched down on a place of shame in Peter's life.

But Peter relents and they cast out their nets and v. 6 (SLIDE) says: **When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.** And it begins to dawn on Peter that the powers that have victimized him over which he had no control, he realizes this guy Jesus has control over all of them. And Peter becomes very exposed. There's no hiding, there's no pretending, there's no justifying, and so Peter does the only thing he can do at that point and vs. 8 (SLIDE) tells us: **Simon Peter fell to his knees and says 'get away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.'**

When shame gets in the presence of perfection, it says get the light off of me, I don't want to be seen like this. Think about the kid who gets his test back and he got a C and all of his friends who got As are saying "hey what did you get?" Or think about the talk around the water cooler where you didn't get a merit raise but all of your peers are talking about the raises

they got. We respond just like Peter in these kinds of situations and we want to hide and stick our heads in the sand.

And so Peter says to Jesus: you don't want to be a part of me, you've now seen my bad side, you can go now, because you don't want to be a part of this. And what I love about Jesus is he says: NO, no I still want you. There's a part of us in our shame that wants to push God away and push other people away. But can I share some good news with you today? I don't know what feels like it's out of control in your life, I don't know in what ways you feel victimized or shamed, but Jesus is in the business of taking shame away. Peter says get away from me, I'm a mess. But Jesus says: no peter, I'm actually going to make you into someone new. Someone who can change the world. And that's what Jesus can do for each of us. He has the power to take your shame away.

The next guy who came up to Jesus is a guy that Jesus probably should have gotten away from. This is our scripture text this morning so I want to read the whole thing to you: <sup>12</sup> **While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy.<sup>[b]</sup> And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."** <sup>13</sup> **And Jesus<sup>[c]</sup> stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean."** And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> **And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them."** <sup>15</sup> **But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.**

So after Jesus' encounter with Peter he comes across a man who according to scripture was full of leprosy. Not only was this disease contagious, but it was humiliating. It was humiliating, because you couldn't hide the fact that you had leprosy and not just that, but you had to live on the outskirts of town and you weren't allowed to be touched by anyone. Can you imagine the levels of shame and humiliation this man must have felt?

Here's what's interesting about this story. The man knows that Jesus can make him clean. He doesn't say if you can, he says if you WILL. See the man is confident Jesus has the ability, what he's unsure of is if Jesus actually

wants to. I believe a lot of you think that way. Some of you today are hearing this message of Jesus can take your shame away and you're saying yea yea, I know that. The pastors say things like Jesus loves you and you say yea yea, I know. But deep down some of you really feel more like God just puts up with you instead of loves you unconditionally and wants the best for you. Some of you know that God loves you, but you're not really sure if he likes you.

And this man comes to Jesus and says: I know you can make me clean, I'm just not sure if you want to. (SLIDE) **And in v.13 it says that Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and healed him. What** must it be like to be someone who has lived in isolation for years, who has never been allowed human contact to have someone reach out and touch you?

This is Vinicio Riva. (SLIDE) He's had a very difficult life. At age 15 he was diagnosed with Neurofibrosis, which is a disease that spreads painful boils across the body. You can imagine the looks this man gets. His father refuses to touch him. Strangers on the street yell at him and tell him to get away from them. Over and over he has received the message that you are unwanted. As painful as his condition is, the psychological damage is far worse.

A few years ago the Pope was going to be near his hometown and so he and his aunt decided to go and try to catch a glimpse. He ended up being ushered up at the front of the crowd. And He thought to himself maybe the Pope would reach out and touch his Aunt's hand and give him a cursory look and maybe a smile. Instead what he got was a 60 second full embrace from the Pope. (SLIDE) Then the Pope put his hands on his head and he kissed him. When they interviewed Vinicio later he said: I felt like I was in paradise. His aunt said in an interview later: he has never been the same since. The way he sees himself and the way he interacts with the world has changed.

In our scripture this man was a leper, pushed away from community and he says: if you're willing, you can make me clean, but Jesus I'm not sure that you want to. And Jesus puts his hands on him and he says: I am willing, be clean. Jesus could have just said be clean. But he uses the word Thelo in

greek and it means “I desire.” It means I want to. Some of you believe God can take your shame away, you’re just not sure that he wants to. But Jesus says: I desire to and I will.

As you can imagine after this miracle, Jesus becomes quite popular. People are doing anything they can to get to him. And so what we see in the next story in chapter 5 is that Jesus is preaching and teaching inside of someone’s home and he’s interrupted by some men who carry their paralytic friend up to him seeking to be healed. Jesus could have healed him, but instead of saying: you’re healed, be made well, he says: Your sins are forgiven. And the religious people in the room start freaking out. They’re throwing penalty flags left and right going: you can’t say that! Only God can say that, you can’t say that.

Like if Tom came up and just popped me in the nose and then Hart strolled in and said: it’s ok Tom, I forgive you. That wouldn’t make any sense! Jesus does what only God can do, he forgives the man’s sins. But in order to show the crowds that he has the authority to do that, he doesn’t just forgive the man, but he heals him. He says in (SLIDE) v.24, **“stand up, take your mat and go home.”** In that moment Jesus is showing us that he doesn’t just want to deal with the external shame, the external problems of our life. He wants to deal with our hearts as well. He wants to deal with the root cause of so many of our problems, sin. Now I’m not saying that sin is what caused this man to be paralyzed. But what I am saying is that at the root of so much of our humiliation and shame is sin.

Sin that you have committed. Or sin that has been committed against you. Maybe for some of you, someone used sexuality in such a way that they committed a sin against you and it brought shame into your life. It wasn’t your fault, you didn’t deserve that, but their sin brought shame into your life. Or maybe for some of you, you used sexuality in such a way that it brought shame into your life. All of us, at the root of it, there’s a thing in our life where we said “I don’t trust God’s prescribed way of managing this,” whether it’s our sexuality, our money, our pride, our jealousy.

And culture is going to continually try and offer us another way and try to convince us that God’s way isn’t best. But culture is wrong. All we need to

do to know how wrong our culture is is to look around at the pain and loneliness and shame we see all over our world. When we decide that our way is better than God's way it will often bring pain and brokenness and shame into our lives. And so Jesus comes and he says: I don't just want to deal with the external problems, I want to get to the root causes. That's the beauty of Jesus; he says I want to heal, I want to take shame away, I want to take sin away. I want to make you into what you were meant to be.

Now at this point, if they weren't already, ALL eyes are on Jesus. And I don't think it's a coincidence what he does next. (SLIDE)**V.27 says Jesus went out and saw a tax collector sitting in the tax booth.** Tax collectors in this time were the scum of the earth because you bought the right from the government to take taxes from people, but then you upcharged them and kept the extra for yourself.

Jesus sees Levi, he walks straight towards him and he says "I want you. Follow me." Jesus just preached a sermon to the entire crowd without even addressing them. It didn't matter how unwanted, unwelcome, how scum of the earth Levi was, Jesus goes straight to him and says: I want you. And so Jesus goes to Levi's house and has a party with all of his tax collector friends. And the religious leaders of the time are beside themselves. They cannot get over the fact that he would associate with these people.

**And I love Jesus' response and we will close with this. (SLIDE)V.31&32, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."** I love this statement. Because in 2 sentences, not only does he express God's heart for us, but he dismantles every false assumption that so many people have about Christianity. I think Christians and those who are curious about Christianity tend to fall into 2 camps.

For some of you in here today, you think of God as a condemner. You think God just wags his finger at people and says: shame on you. Some of you probably didn't want to come this morning, because you thought you would be judged and others of you maybe came because you felt like you deserved to be judged and pushed away. And Jesus says: NO... I don't do that. Do physicians do that? Do doctors go: ohhh, you're sick, get away

from me, yuck. NO.... that would be a terrible doctor! Doctors hang out with sick people. Jesus says: I'm not here to push sinners away, if you're a mess, that's who I'm looking for! I'm coming for you in the mess.

God as condemner is one group of people, but there are others of you who view Jesus as the acceptor. For you Jesus is just saying: hey, get in here Bro, let me give you a hug, you're ok, you just do you. You be yourself, you just be comfortable with who you are and you do you. That's the Jesus culture is trying to feed us.

But listen to what Jesus says: He says I'm the physician and I came here for the sick. So what's the assumption at the party? He's sitting around with all of these tax collectors and he says: I'm the doctor and I'm here for sick people. And they're all like: Hey....Are you saying there's something wrong with us? He's like: yes there is something wrong with you, BUT I still want to be with you. I'm not condemning and pushing away, but I'm not just accepting either. Jesus wants to change us. You don't coddle illness. You don't say: I love this flu, I love feeling clammy and cold and yet burning up all at the same time. No, it's a parasite and you get it out. So you can be fully you.

The only requirement is that we acknowledge that we need healing. How do you get well? When is it that you go to the doctor? When you acknowledge that you're sick. How do we find wholeness in Christ? If you want a few quick takeaways from the sermon, here they are. #1 (SLIDE) It starts with confession. It starts by admitting: I have some things in my life and in my heart that aren't right.

A lot of people think Christianity is be a good person and God will like you, and while that's true of many religions, that's not what the Gospel says. The Gospel, that is the good news of Jesus, says we don't come to God with our accomplishments, we come to him with our needs and our brokenness and our shame and we come empty handed. And we say I've got some questions I can't answer, I've got some shame that holds me back and I've got some brokenness I can't overcome.

After we have admitted our brokenness, I think the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing we often need to do is seek some help. (SLIDE) Quit suffering in silence. This is true for what Tom talked about last week with depression and the week before with fear and next week with anxiety. These kinds of things aren't meant to be managed in isolation. You need a discipleship community group. You need an accountability group. Maybe you need to come to CR on Monday nights. In some cases you may need professional help. We have a great list of counselors that we refer people to. There is NO shame in admitting you need help.

If you think you might need a counselor, but you're not sure that you are ready to take that step, can I offer you another solution? Get a Stephen Minister. Stephen ministers are trained lay people in our congregation that are equipped to provide one-on-one Christian care to those who are hurting and struggling. We have some incredible Stephen Ministers here at Asbury that would love to come along side of you in the midst of your struggles. Our Stephen Ministry team is set up out in the lobby this morning and would love to visit with you about what they may be able to offer. For others of you, perhaps you'd want to become a Stephen minister. I hope you will go visit with them after the service.

**(TIM START PLAYING)**

So #1 we admit we need help, #2 we actually seek help and we don't do it alone and finally, #3 we need Jesus. (SLIDE)

God's response to all of our sin and brokenness was to send his son Jesus Christ to live among us. To live the life we could not and die the death that we deserved. Through Jesus' death on the cross our sin has already been paid for. Jesus Christ conquered death and says because I have beaten death, I can liberate you from that which holds you back. And so if I could offer you ANYTHING this morning it would be an invitation to come and get to know Jesus better. If you've been in a rut lately in your faith, re-commit yourself this morning to coming to worship every week. Seek out a Sunday morning adult discipleship community. Talk to our discipleship team about

other small group opportunities that we have. And if you've never given your heart to Jesus, I would urge you to consider that today. He is the only one that can fill every one of your heart's desires and he is the only one who can take your shame and turn it into a confident humility that exudes the peace and joy of Jesus.

**11AM: Short Communion Liturgy (Servers get up and get set!!).**