

Not Idly By – Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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Many of you are old enough to remember the time when doctors made house calls. Whether it was to deliver a baby or to treat an unknown illness, doctors used to come calling to people's homes to personally deliver their medical expertise and care.

My only recollection of doctors making home visits was through television. In watching reruns of the television show "Little House on the Prairie," I remember Doc Baker, who, as the only doctor in Walnut Grove, had his hands full healing the sick, mending the wounded and delivering babies. His endless house calls left him little time for his own life. But Doc was sensitive to the misfortunes of others. That's why his gentle, compassionate, and wise demeanor made him the treasured resident of Walnut Grove.

Such was always the case with physicians who made house calls. They were revered for their compassion and dedication—reflected in the personal attention they gave their patients by going to their homes.

Maybe, aside from the sound medicine they practiced, doctors who made house calls gained our admiration because they were always the ones who took the initiative to come to us. They showed how much they cared by going out of their way to reach out to us, instead of us having to go to them.

In Matthew 9, we find a similar physician who took his care and healing to the people. He didn't sit back and wait

for them to come to him (although many did as his reputation got out). He was willing to go where the sick were, where the suffering lived, to bring healing and wholeness to their lives.

Jesus was proactive in taking his healing power to the masses. And he went to some places that weren't all that popular in the eyes of the established leaders of the day. But for those who were sick or who otherwise suffered from being cast out and labeled as unworthy of healing, Jesus took the initiative to treat them with the same personalized attention as any righteous person of faith.

Last Sunday, we talked about how Jesus' Great Commission to go make disciples was grounded in sharing the principles of his teaching. And how those principles were rooted in showing mercy.

In this text from Matthew, Jesus again demonstrates that commitment. And does not sit idly by. He goes, as Abram went on the Lord's command in Genesis, and practiced mercy, including while being intercepted by the bleeding woman on his way to the religious leader's dying daughter.

He's intentional, focused, and not easily deterred.

In Jesus' approach to healing and caring, there are lessons for us as to how we are to do our jobs of ministering and discipling. That approach is one based on being active and not passive. It means going out and meeting people where they are, rather than waiting for them to come to us. It means finding people lost or hurting where they live and bringing a message of hope and healing that awaits us in Jesus Christ.

In essence, it means making house calls. It means being assertive in our care, compassion, and invitation to serve God together.

All it takes to be effective in our calling as disciples is a little assertiveness, the willingness to go where people are and share love, sympathy, or an invitation to join us in serving.

In Jesus' committed practice of making house calls on those who were in need, he did something else in the process. He didn't let the interruptions of his day stop him from being compassionate and helpful both during and after the interruption.

On his way to heal the young daughter of a synagogue leader, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years pulled on his cloak and asked Jesus to heal her of her illness. And instead of brushing her off in order to get to the dying young girl, Jesus takes time to stop and heal her as well.

He made a house call on the way to making a house call. The interruption didn't keep him from doing ministry.

How many times have you gotten interrupted in your day-to-day routines and have treated the interruption as an annoyance or nuisance? How many times have you treated that interruption as a roadblock toward getting done all that you wanted to accomplish in a given day?

Someone once wisely told me, "Pay attention to the interruptions. For in those moments of interruption, you will truly find the opportunity to be God's agent of compassion, counsel, and healing."

We all have the potential to make house calls—being assertive in our compassion and discipleship—when we aren't expecting or necessarily seeking the opportunity. Sometimes those moments present themselves at just the wrong time, or so it seems. But as Jesus demonstrated, sometimes, despite their inconvenience, we have the most potential of being effective witnesses of God's love and peace.

When Jesus called his disciples he did not call them to a course survey, or to a graduate seminar. Jesus called his disciples to active practice. Immediately after Matthew was called, he got up from his everyday life and walked out.

As Jesus called his disciples, healed those in need, taught those who listened, he always asked for some active response. Matthew -- and before him Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John -- were asked to make a move in order to accept their new status as disciples. They got up. They left their established routines. They stepped out onto a new road.

Even those to whom Jesus offered healing took some form of initiative. The hemorrhaging woman boldly reached out and touched Jesus, convinced by her faith that her action will bring her "health/salvation/wellness." The little girl, already gone from this life, is touched by Jesus' life-giving hand, but she then struggled to her own feet while gripping that hand.

With all this in mind, Pastor Leonard Sweet asks, "How then did the church become a kind of "Sunday Spa" for the spiritually supine? Where did this "Jacuzzi Jesus" come from? Where and when did we decide that our faith, our

discipleship journey, was a weekly "sit and soak" respite, an exercise in pew potato-hood?..."

That's a comfortable mentality. That's sitting in the reassurance of how Jesus loves us. And yet, we're called to be active and assertive in our faith, to make house calls, to take the message of Jesus' healing and wholeness to the people, where the people are, often in the midst of the interruptions of our day.

All this according to our own ability, of course. And when the day is done, and we've given what we can to the healing of others and even the world through our giving, we can rest assured that Christ—and others through Christ—are reaching out to us with care and a desire to take away our pain. God is not sitting idly by as we linger in pain or sorrow.

Harry Block, in a piece titled, "The Healing Power of Prayer" on the website for Temple Beth-El in San Antonio some years back, wrote, "I want to tell you about a woman I'll call Joyce, a member in our congregation who found herself hospitalized with a life-threatening malignancy. Joyce's doctor, also a Temple member, told me that her particular cancer was usually fatal. Joyce simply did not accept this verdict. She told her doctor that she intended to live to see her grandson, then 5, celebrate his Bar Mitzvah.

"Joyce told me repeatedly that she believed that God was on her side. At the conclusion of each visit that I made to her in the hospital, I held her hand and offered a prayer, concluding with the *Shema*, which we recited together. One day, by coincidence — or was it divine intervention? — her doctor came into the room while I was still there. She

witnessed, and then joined in, our prayer. I could see that the doctor was moved, and later she told me that the prayer had affected her deeply.

“Joyce recovered from that illness, and we continue to pray that it will not return, that she will indeed celebrate her grandson’s Bar Mitzvah. Would she have recovered without medical attention? Certainly not. Did the prayers have an effect? I believe that they did. Were our prayers answered because of the positive mental effect they had on Joyce, and on her doctor, or because they invited God’s intervention? I don’t know, but I am sure that nobody can prove that God did not bring healing I affirm, with faith, that God was there in that room when Joyce and her family, her doctor and I, were saying those prayers. God was there in her recovery.”

That’s what we all yearn to find in our moments of deepest yearning—the healing that comes in simply having the presence of God with us. Maybe our diseases are not cured, maybe our pain isn’t taken away. Yet, in the presence of the Divine through those God sends our way, healing can still take place.

God makes house calls.