

THE LORD IS COME TO THE NEEDY ADVENT WORSHIP
LUKE 5:31-32, ROM 5:6-10 WED DEC 2, '15

³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

This is time of year full of interesting contrasts.

On one hand a time when our society is obsessed
more than any other time with
what is bright, shiny, new and happy
resulting in a big push to buy things we don't need.

On other hand, a time when our society takes note
more than any other time of those who are needy
resulting in efforts to give them things at same time.

This may betray assumption that getting things
is what Christmas is really all about
and these things are what make people happy.

And maybe partly to make us feel better
about all the even nicer things we do for ourselves
which we may feel more like we deserve
if we have done some nice things for others.

But maybe a more positive way of seeing the connection
is realizing that the whole reason Jesus came
was to help the needy
and paying attention to the needy can help us see
that we are among the needy for whom Jesus came.

THE NEEDY HAVE MANY KINDS OF NEEDS
THE NEEDY ARE HARD TO HELP
JESUS COMES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIFE.

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physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Gospel reading shows Jesus helping those sick in various ways.

One was man full of leprosy, a miserable, deadly disease.

Some leprosy was quite contagious so it also resulted in social isolation, including separation from family.

One crowd where lepers were not allowed was worship.

Physical uncleanness implied spiritual uncleanness and separation not just from people but from God.

One reason leprosy was so common in those days

was its connection with uncleanness

it was disease exacerbated by unsanitary conditions.

Another man was paralyzed, unable to walk.

We are not told how he ended up this way.

Another time when disciples saw a man born crippled the wondered if it was result of his sin or his parent's sin,

showing assumption suffering is from doing wrong.

maybe because it is seen as punishment from God

and maybe partly because of observation that

if you do stupid things, often bad things happen.

Jesus said it was neither he nor his parent's fault

but allowed by God for sake of good that would result

when God was glorified through his healing.

But with this man Jesus does demonstrate that

our greatest need is indeed forgiveness of our sins

and suffering may be increased by fear

that God hates us because of our sins.

Think just a bit more about this man.

What if after he was healed he continued to lie around waiting for others to carry him around.

He would be no better off than he was before.

So he needed change of behavior with change of condition

This brings us to a man who doesn't appear to be suffering.

He is rich and has friends and is apparently healthy.

But he is easily recognized as a sinner alienated from God

and Jesus calls him to a change of behavior,

leaving everything to follow him as a disciple.

He is one Jesus is speaking of when he says it is

those who are sick who are in need of a physician.

Here we see illustrated three kinds of needs,

need for change in condition, both physical and spiritual,

need for change in behavior, and need for
change in system in which that behavior occurs.

These are needs we also have because we too
get sick, are always crippled and diseased with sin,
as result, do things which cause misery to us & others,
and all live in world filthy and corrupted by sin.

So, no wonder

THE NEEDY ARE HARD TO HELP

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the
ungodly.

When people are physically sick and weak,
it is often hard to eat or exercise or do other things
that are necessary to be healthy so they get worse.
So often, sick end up with one problem on top of another:
complications, infections, bed sores, etc.
Yet sometimes, the symptoms of pain or swelling are treated
while undiagnosed underlying causes keep getting worse.
I recently read article by man who went along to deliver
Christmas presents to children of poor families.
He noticed how children smiled as fathers scowled
and snuck out back door in shame
at being treated as poor providers for their family
and mothers put on brave face but also felt the hurt
of what was happening to the family dynamic.
He reflected on how well meaning attempts to do good
can end up doing harm to what is most important: family
in which children can rely on parents to care for them.
He turned instead to what others have also done,
working for business selling things at low cost
and employing the poor so that they could afford them.
This is, of course, much harder to do,
but sometimes changing the system and changing behavior
is the most important way to actually help.
Sometimes the needy may do things that actually
make their problems worse.
not eating healthy food or doing preventative health care
and ending up needing expensive emergency care.
they may buy cheap things which don't last
or not take care of things they have.
This is encouraged by fact that systems in our society
are skewed for the benefit of those who are well off.

If you have a car & get newspaper, you can find good deals
and save by buying in bulk.
If you don't, you spend more for same at convenience store.
If you have reliable good income, you can get good loan rate;
you could use credit card, keep money, pay at end of month.
But if not, you will pay high rate of interest on balance
or pay high rate of interest for pay-day loan and get poorer.
If you can't afford your house and become homeless,
you may well lose everything else you spent money on
because now you have no place to keep it.
If you stay in school and get good education, it is easier
to get good job & provide good education for children.
But if chaotic family life makes it hard to learn in school
and working long hours at low wage job
makes it hard to go back to school,
problems may increase generation after generation.
Point is not to solve all the world's problems here and now
but to recognize world is full of difficult problems
and to see that problems may result from behavior
including our behavior,
which tends to fit into the twisted system of a broken world
This is the world to which Jesus came.

JESUS COMES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIFE.

¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the
death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be
saved by his life.

One problem tends to lead to another.
But Jesus helps us in one way that leads to another.
Jesus came to the needy.
He didn't just fly by and leave some nice stuff
every so often.
He didn't just keep sending manna falling from heaven
so everyone has enough to eat.
He did the harder thing. He came to be with the needy,
He was born in the poorest conditions
and lived as a homeless person
He touched the unclean and comforted the ashamed
and welcomed the outcast.
and, most important, went to a criminals death on the cross

not just to take our suffering on himself
but to take our sins on himself.

He deals with our suffering by not just soothing symptoms
but going to the root of our greatest need.

His forgiveness is not just a hand out that pays off
the debt of our sin so we can go out & sin again.
but it also sets us free from the chronic cycle of sin
which traps us in a downward spiral.

So, the gift of forgiveness is what enables new behavior
and changed lives so now we can do what is good
for others and ourselves.

But Jesus doesn't just set us on our feet & pat us on the back,
he stays with us to love and renew us every day,
even as we continue to stumble along.

Because we do still live in weak bodies with weak souls,
and we live in a world that is broken & dysfunctional.

This is why, in this season, we celebrate that not only
did Jesus come to be with us in our neediness
but is also coming again, because he has redeemed us,
to take us out of this corrupted system
to heaven where at last all needs will be gone.

No more let sins & sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found.

As we notice especially in this season,

THE NEEDY HAVE MANY KINDS OF NEEDS

both physical and spiritual, and we ourselves are needy
and make needs worse by what we do.

THE NEEDY ARE HARD TO HELP

because we need not only a change in condition
but also a change in behavior and in systems.

JESUS COMES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIFE.

He took our suffering and our sin on himself
to make one good thing lead to another,
transforming our lives here with his forgiveness
and bringing us to new lives in heaven.