**Crossing the Street Series
Sermon 3: Modelling the Heart of Jesus [Scott Pilgrim]**

Luke 7:11-17

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Hi, I'm Scott Pilgrim, the Executive Director of Baptist Mission Australia. And it's my privilege to share with you in our Crossing the Street series.

I’ll never forget the day that I took my oldest boy home from hospital, my first child. There I was, a new dad and suddenly the responsibility for this new life in my hands. The anxiousness, the nervousness, the joy that goes with that, all those mixed emotions. And there I was, putting PJ into the baby seat in the car, about to drive home, a new chapter in life beginning. I put him in the seat and I checked the seat belt, I checked it again and I checked it again. I'm ready to drive out of the hospital.

I get to the first intersection full of joy and exuberance and hope. I stopped the car and a hearse drives by, a funeral cortege. I was struck in that moment - a moment I'll never forget - that intersection of hope and joy and life, and death and pain and sorrow. And there I was at that intersection. Sometimes in life we find ourselves in those same intersections, where life is mixed with joy and sorrow, hope and despair.

We've experienced that particularly over recent years in the pandemic, haven't we? Individually, in families, as church communities and our workers have across the world. In Luke's Gospel, in Luke chapter seven - in one of my favourite passages in the Scriptures - we have this intersection story. I just love it. Two crowds meet, one full of joy and exuberance, full of curiosity and hope, the other full of grief, pain, loss, disappointment and despair.

And where is Jesus? He's right there, front and centre, in the middle of the two crowds. The God who meets us where we are, the God of all seasons. In Luke chapter seven, verses 11 to 17. Jesus has earlier healed the centurion, the officers servant, the slave. We see this beautiful healing incident. And there's a crowd who leave Capernaum following Jesus, they've seen this miracle, the slave’s been healed!

And there's the crowd following Jesus. They're full of exuberance and hope and joy. I’m reminded of that kind of picture when I take my kids to the footy and their team wins, they walk back down Punt Road to the railway station, and there's people singing and there's joy and there's exuberance.

In that crowd that day, there were the disciples, there were the people who are following Jesus. But there was the opposition as well. There's a sense of joy and hope in the crowd. But Luke wants us to see this, almost in the white space between the text in our Bible, that as that crowd full of joy and exuberance comes from Capernaum, they meet a crowd coming out of the city of Nain. And who do they meet? There is a woman who has lost her husband, and who has now lost her only son, a picture, in that culture, of devastation.

Picture someone today right on the margins of society. Picture someone today in the margins of society, in our community, or the communities we work around the world. And here is this woman. There are people carrying the coffin of her son. There is the cortege mourners. Suddenly I read this passage and I’m back, bringing my boy out of the hospital. Life and death intersect. And here's this crowd weeping. And here is this woman, and the two crowds meet. And there is Jesus.

Today, whether you're walking through the valley, or whether you stand on the mountaintop of life, in the midst of the tension that we always live with in life, the promise, the reality of our Immanuel God, of Jesus incarnate who breaks into human history, the God who is for us, the God who is with us, the God who is with you today, interested in every aspect of your life, the God who crosses the street, to bring love and grace and hope.

And what do we see in this passage? What do we see about the heart of Jesus? What can we learn for us as individuals and local churches, whether we cross the street in a city of Australia or a small country town, or whether it's one of our intercultural workers crossing the street around the world for people who don't know Jesus in a way that makes sense to them? What can we take from this passage, what does it mean to model the heart of Jesus?

Very simply, in this passage, we see that Jesus SEES, Jesus FEELS, and Jesus ACTS. It's simple, but profound if we apply that through our life, reminding ourselves that mission is not in our hands, that that God is already at work, that God is already at work in our communities, the Holy Spirit is already at work and God's gracious invitation to you and I, is to step out, to cross the street, to open our eyes, to see, to feel and to act.

Jesus *sees* the woman. I love this in this passage. We read in Luke's Gospel, Jesus *saw* the woman. There was this woman weeping, full of despair. And Jesus looks her in the eyes, Jesus saw the woman.

We read in John's Gospel as Jesus comes to the pool, and around the pool are so many people with disabilities, people crying out for hope, believing superstitiously that if the water bubbles up, and they get in first, they'll be healed.

And we read, Jesus saw the man, a man who has been paralysed, who hasn't walked for almost 40 years, Jesus *saw* the man.

The hope for you and I today, the truth for you and I today, that Jesus sees us! He sees me, he sees you, with our hopes and our dreams and aspirations, and our plans for the future. But he sees us as we are also with our brokenness and our pain, our grief and our sadness. And it may be today you need to remind yourself of a God who meets you at the intersection of life.

Jesus sees the woman. Jesus sees the woman on the Silk Road today. A long way away from where I'm speaking in Australia, is a young family, Aussie Baptists, Ben and Petra who've crossed the street in fact, they've crossed the world in service of Jesus. They're modelling the heart of Jesus in a community where so few people know the good news of Jesus in a way that makes sense. They're embodying that good news by word and deed every day.

Petra has a heart for kids with disabilities. She's trained in Australia in that field, she senses God preparing her, God at work in her world. She has crossed the street in Australia and cared for kids. She has now crossed the street around the worlds. And what do we see in this story with Ben and Petra? Ordinary people, humble, passionate, yet called by God with the mission of God in their hands.

There is Petra on the Silk Road. And she sees kids. She sees kids in her community, she sees kids in that country, a broken, struggling nation, she sees kids in a shame culture, who are pushed to the margins because of their disabilities.

I've got a little boy with a disability. I don't think about him that way at all. He's just an ordinary kid who I love to death. But in that culture, he'd be pushed to the margins. But there is Petra, she sees the kids with a heart of Jesus, she sees them as they are, and as they could become, just as Jesus saw the woman. But it's more than just seeing, I can see needs all around me and get on with my life. In the good Samaritan story, the religious leaders, they see the man in the ditch, but they pass by. We’re called to more than ‘see’.

Jesus sees, and that he feels. He feels. The translation that we get in our English Bibles today, maybe the Bible you've got in front of you, might say, “Jesus had compassion on the woman.” That doesn't quite cut mustard. The Greek texts reveal that Jesus gut was moved, His bowels were moved. We probably don't want to use that language when we read the passage, but that's what it means. He so felt for the woman that his stomach turned. It was a deep inside feeling of love and compassion for this woman.

I love when I read that because it reminds me of a God who was not distant or detached. But a God who breaks into the world and who sees me and knows me. You see, it's one thing for Petra to see kids with disabilities, but she also has that gut response. She feels. She has compassion. She's experienced the compassion and the love and the heart of Jesus in her life. And she wants to embody that for others.

Jesus sees the woman he feels for the woman. Petra, seeing kids in a shame culture being pushed to the margins. But Petra realises that they've been created, these kids have been created, in the image of God and she wants to uphold their dignity and improve their wellbeing in life. She sees and she feels.

But then of course Jesus acts. Jesus comes to the coffin. Just imagine the scene, the two crowds have met and they're watching on. And Jesus touches the coffin. And the young man comes back to life. It's a beautiful text. Listen to this. It's beautiful because it says, Jesus gave the woman back her son. In other words, Jesus is about making all things new. Jesus is about bringing life, where there is death, about bringing hope where there is hopelessness, about bringing joy where there is despair. The God who meets us where we are.

Now, as a pastor, I've done many funerals. I just did another one recently and I count it a privilege to share with people in that season of life. But you know, I've never done a funeral where I've touched the coffin, and suddenly the person has come back to life. I reckon if I had, I'd be doing a lot more funerals!

So what do we learn from this passage? Here is the Son of God. Here is the miracle working God who brings the young man back to life, who restores the young man, but in a sense restores the life of the woman who's lost the husband. The son has given back hope and her life is restored too.

Bill Ellis, who writes about this passage, a commentator, a theologian, says that when Jesus touches the coffin, and the young man comes back to life, we see a glimpse of the Kingdom now and not yet. We see Jesus restoring that young man to life as a picture of ushering in the Kingdom of God.

But we also see in today's world, the fact that we live in the Kingdom now and not yet. We still see the horrors of Ukraine, or poverty around the world, we see needs in our own community. We see women escaping domestic violence, we see more than 100,000 Australians homeless every night, we see racism, we see hatred around the world. We see suffering as we cross the street in our own neighbourhood. We see brokenness in our own lives. I’ve experienced that. We live in the Kingdom now and not yet.

And so what are we called to? What does it mean to model the heart of Jesus? It means we cross the street today in Jesus name. And each and every day in small or big ways, as we serve others as we embody the hope of Jesus, what are we doing? We're modelling the heart of Jesus.

What is Petra doing? She sees, she feels and she acts in a community that is broken, in a country where the health system needs restoration. In a country where there isn't all the medical services that we take for granted in Australia today, in a country where kids are still pushed to the margins because of disabilities. What does Petra do? She sees, she feels but then she acts.

She recently spoke at a significant conference. She spoke at that conference in the language of the local people. She spoke in a way that made sense. She spoke about a different way of responding to kids, a different way that the health system could change. She got much applause and future conversations are opening up for her. There's the opportunity for this young Australian woman to make a significant difference for kids in a country far from us. Why? Because she knows God's love in her life. And her desire to cross the street in Jesus’ name, to see, to feel and to act, to bring hope - the Kingdom now and not yet.

I love what Cornelius Plantinga says, speaking about Shalom. What's Shalom? We often hear it in the Jewish culture to mean peace. You might have seen it on a movie, you might have a friend who's Jewish. Shalom. Peace. But the word actually means far more than that. It means peace. It means hope. It means joy. It means reconciliation. It means restoration. It means wholeness. It means fullness. It's a rich and beautiful word.

It really means to be right with God. To be right with others to be right with self and to be right with the world. It's the world as it should be. I love that. Cornelius Plantinga says, “It's the way things ought to be.”

Jesus comes to the woman. He sees the need. He feels. He acts. He sees the world the way it should be. Petra, on the Silk Road, working with kids, with the hope of bringing dignity and restoration and newness in the way that those children treated. She is seeking to do God's work, in other words, to see things the way they ought to be. I love that. It's simple. But it's challenging. That every day, you and I are invited to cross the street, in our neighbourhood.

I wonder today as you open your eyes afresh, as you open your heart afresh, as you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life, in your street, in your workplace, in your community. I wonder where God is graciously inviting you to model the heart of Jesus?

My wife, Megan, has a heart for refugees and asylum seekers, particularly for women and children. So many asylum seeker women and refugee women in our communities who've lost their husbands and who've got kids and are trying to make sense of how they can do life in Australia, with still strict restrictions around them and the experience of racism and hatred. How do they do life? How should life look for them through the lens of Jesus.

And there's my wife, humbly, crossing the street, collecting clothes and blankets from friends, organising meals, helping people pay bills and sign up to get a telephone. The most practical things, helping them with finding a house, simply day by day, modelling the heart of Jesus. It's simple things that she does, it's humble things that she does, she doesn't want it to be brought to attention. She probably wouldn't like me talking about it right now.

But why does she do it? Because she sees, she feels and she acts. Today in South Asia, in one of the most broken countries around the world, in one of the poorest countries of the world, Baptist Mission Australia workers and our partners are on the ground. We've been there for many years. Why? Because we seek to make things as they should be. We seek to bring Shalom by word and deed.

But we can only do that with the support of Australian Baptists around the country. As you cross the street in your neighbourhood, so we cross the world. We cross streets, in Africa, in Asia, in Outback Australia, Urban Australia. But we only do that in partnership with you. We cheer you on as you seek to bring Shalom into your community. And we invite you to pray for us as we seek to bring Shalom into communities around the world, as we seek to bring the hope and the heart of Jesus.

And you know, in South Asia today, there are health services, there are agricultural services, there are employment services, there are services for women that are restoring dignity to women. There are so many good things happening in that country, as the heart and the hope of Jesus is modelled by ordinary people, including Aussie Baptists. And you're a part of that.

Ben is one of our workers in Mozambique. And let me finish today with this story from Ben. Ben recently wrote to me about a road. Yes, a road! Where Ben lives, it's 144 kilometres from his community through Mozambique, to where one of our teams also work in Malawi. That 144 kilometres strip, on a good day, took four or five hours to drive on. On a bad day, eight hours! Get your head around that in our culture. Eight hours on a road that only goes for 144 kilometres! Full of potholes, and huge craters that Ben says were big enough for a car to fall into. When it rains half the road is washed away.

And yet it's the road to get from point A to point B for that local community and for our workers. Over the last two years, a new road has been laid down, a bitumen road, a road that we would take for granted as we cross streets in our community. It's taken a long time. There's been detours and disappointments and holdups and setbacks. But the road has finally been built. And you know, now that they can get from point A to point B in less than two hours! And Ben can ride that tarmac on his pushbike for exercise.

The local people call it the road of dreams, a road, a piece of infrastructure has changed that community. So, why are we talking about a road? Well, Ben tells me the day that he first drove on that new road he pulled over to the side of the road, and he laid down on the bitumen. Now, I'm not recommending you do that at home, but he laid down on the tarmac, he felt that road, and he looked up and he saw the expanse of where he was working. And he was suddenly struck by this reality - it's Jesus who makes all things new. It's Jesus who makes all things new.

Here was a new road. But a reminder that life has many bumps, and detours and disappointments and craters. That at times we feel like the road has been washed away. At times, we feel like we're not sure what's happening in our lives.

At times, we're on the mountains, but other times we're in the valleys. But in the midst of that, it's Jesus who makes all things new.

Jesus sees the woman, has a heart of compassion for her. He touches the coffin and brings the young man back to life. And Petra, seeing, feeling and acting. Ben in Mozambique embodying the good news of Jesus, reminded that Jesus makes all things new. And our invitation today, my invitation to cross the street, to open our eyes afresh to people in need. A neighbour, a woman down the street, an old man in a building down the road, a refugee and asylum seeker, an indigenous person living with disadvantage - we open our eyes a fresh in our community.

The invitation for us is to bring the heart of Jesus, to see, to feel, toe act, to cross the street together in Jesus’ name. God bless you.