

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

February 25, 2024 "Leap of Faith: The Norms Breaking Leap"

I Intro.

We're well into 2024 now, and we've got a lot going on. We don't want you to miss out on anything. So, make sure you stay connected to keep informed. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on Facebook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

We're doing the "Leap of Faith" series because often there is this tiny nagging voice inside of us telling us it's time for a change, something different. We call that 'holy discontent'. It's not an unhappiness with life or with something specific. Most of the time it's answering the question; "**Does what I'm doing matter?**" "**Am I making a difference?**" Life can often feel like the movie "Groundhog Day". We're going through the motions just existing rather than actually living ...fully. So, this series is not to push us in a particular direction, or do a specific thing. It's asking if we need to take that one step, a "leap of faith", into something that's been in the back of our mind for a while. Just whispering to us to take a risk. We want to help you if you find yourself in this place. And give you some assurance that it's okay. You can trust God. So, a couple more questions.

What can help you step out of comfort into unknown new places?

What has to change, move inside of you to be able to do this?

III Sunday.

After three weeks of talking about our own personal work, we talked about what it means to take a "leap of faith" that creates an open and welcoming environment for others to take their own "leap of faith". I don't want this to only be about church and accepting others. This needs to be about how we can allow the Holy Spirit form us, mold us deep inside, to be a follower who will inspire and encourage others to take their own "leap of faith".

The conversation Sunday was about norms we hold onto that define and create expectations about how people are supposed to be and live. We all have them. If you've ever found yourself saying something like; "Why don't those people just..." or "The world would be a better place if people would...", then we are guilty of using our norms as a weapon to make others more like us. And it takes a brave and honest person to be willing to look inward to see how we're enforcing our norms as the standard. So, let's begin that awkward and uncomfortable 'leap' to examine our own beliefs.

What are some behaviors or issues you feel very strongly about?

What are those beliefs or values grounded in?

How do those beliefs affect how you relate to others different from you?

This final *“leap of faith”* is the work we have to do to create an environment that is so open and inviting that it encourages others to take their own *“leap of faith”* towards Jesus. Read the story in **Mark 5:24-34** and will pull out some practices.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What did this woman have to overcome to take her *“leap of faith”*?

What did Jesus do to be a person who helped her take her *“leap of faith”*?

This is such an incredible story. And because we don't have the same law in place, we miss how scandalous this account was. Because Jewish Law was so specific, and at times harsh, this woman had to let others know she was unclean. She was hidden because people knew she felt the shame that came with her condition. And she never felt any compassion or love that would allow her to be included in religious life. What are some truths we can pull from this passage, how Jesus lived, that will allow us to relate to others at the margins to help them take their own *“leap of faith”*?

1. We must be able to ‘leap’ from rules and laws that exclude, to radical inclusion.

We need to wrestle with the word inclusion. We don't like it because we have defined it as allowing. Like Jesus, we have to push past our tendency to equate acceptance of a person with acceptance of lifestyle. This woman was by The Law not allowed to be in public. Leviticus 15:19-33. This woman was condemned as unclean, unworthy, and expected by the religious norms of the day to not be allowed around others. And because Jewish Law forbade her from being in public or in the synagogue, it also forced her to declare her uncleanness and unworthiness. In this *“leap of faith”* what this woman most likely touched was the tassel that hung from the robe of Jesus, that was a reminder to the wearer of the significance and obedience to The Law. This would be a truth that was intentionally placed in the story to let us know, and highlight the emphasis and importance of inclusion should cause us to leap from legalism to compassion.

The movement of all of scripture was from the protection of the nation of Israel and preserving their norms, to a ‘good news’ that was for everyone. We tend to believe this evangelically. We believe in taking the good news to all people and that no one is exempt. But we still place our understanding of norms (our understanding of The Law) onto the behavior of others. This story and the response of Jesus is clearly saying; A true *“leap of faith”* requires us to leap from protecting our understanding of expected norms to radical inclusion.

2. The purpose of our practiced beliefs is to heal not isolate.

We tend to wall off, isolate others from the good news by making following Jesus (faith, belief) Jesus and...something else. How you vote. Your stand on a specific issue. Your lifestyle. Not saying everything is permissible. I strongly believe a life committed towards Jesus has to look a certain way. I'm so strict about what following Jesus looks like I don't even live up to MY own norms and standards. And that's why we hold our norms loosely, always bent towards a lifestyle of healing others rather than isolating them. My point is, Jesus showed here the purpose of our norms is to heal, draw others to himself. And if they don't then we need to reevaluate them.

Does what we believe, and how we practice our faith, encourage others to take a *“leap of faith”* towards Jesus, or force them to stay hidden in shame?

The *“leap of faith”* this woman took was from hidden into the open. She was hidden because people knew she was unclean, and would have run her off if they had seen her. That's why she couldn't just

come up to Jesus out in the open. She would have been shamed away. She had to stay in the shadows just hoping she could be healed. And this was possible because Jesus created a persona of openness, approachability, warmth, radical acceptance, that allowed people to come out of the shadows. This cultivated environment is a leap that helps those who would rather stay hidden can take their *“leap of faith”*. People for the most part don't want to stay hidden from us. We have to be people who practice the healing touch.

3. We are not soiled by what religion declares unclean.

The danger of weaponized labels. Fill in the blank. **God can't accept _____ until they _____.** We love us some law. It creates a neat, stark, line between right and wrong. And we often quote the O.T. in making those points. The truth is the O.T. was a covenant only between Israel and God. I'm not saying there isn't truth in it. It reveals the nature and heart of a God who loves the nation of Israel, and exchanged vows with them. The purpose of religion in the O.T. was to protect the people of Israel so they could be God's people. But Jesus came to fulfill what The Law demanded, required, and do away with it. Hebrews 8:13 talks about the Old Covenant becoming obsolete. The problem that always happens is the drift towards exclusivity and institutionalism. Rather than religion being a bridge, ways to describe God and living for him to draw people to God. Religion becomes walls and a way to let people know who's in and who's out. Hear me say this. Jesus was very specific, pointed, and demanding about what it meant to follow him. We cannot be soft there. But the call wasn't to do those things. It was to follow him. To come and see. In that *“leap of faith”*, the Holy Spirit would grow within us the desire and strength to live for Jesus.

4. Our default must always be compassion and mercy.

This woman realized she could not stay hidden. She had to take her own *“leap of faith”*. And she was able to do that because she sensed in the nature of Jesus, he was a safe person to take a *“leap of faith”* towards. Because she saw, and we do too, in Jesus the primacy of addressing human need and hurt overrides religion and norms. This is a really tough truth I want us to wrestle with. We play down the significance of her 'untouchableness'. Real word. She was not allowed or accepted in public by her religion. But because of the compassion and mercy of Jesus in how he carried himself, this hidden, full of shame, rejected woman felt she could trust in Jesus enough to take her very own, very scary, *“leap of faith”*. THAT is the power of compassion and mercy, fully on display in public for others to see and feel. And that is what allows people of today to take a norm breaking *“leap of faith”*.

IV Challenge.

The challenge is simple and straightforward. But it's so difficult. **Are we willing to honestly examine the norms we hold to see if they force others to stay hidden. Or do they give them the safest landing place to take their own “leap of faith”?** So, how about it?