



Disability Sunday Activities

Sermons

Preparing the sermon

Remember that there may be people with learning disabilities present, and they are likely to have a limited vocabulary. Christian terminology may not be understood, so jargon is out! Simple language is essential for clear communication with people with learning disabilities (and it can also make a surprisingly effective impact on everyone else too.)

General Sermon Points

(These can be usefully incorporated into any sermon)

In the Gospels 35 specific miracles are recorded.

3 cases of raising the dead: (all examples of his care for the carers)

- the widow's son at Nain
- Jairus' daughter
- Lazarus at Bethany

9 miracles which break the natural laws of physics which include;

- feeding the 5000
- walking on water
- calming the storm
- turning water into wine

23 miracles involving disabled people

- 6 involve mental illness
- 17 (half the total number of recorded miracles) involve physical disability including, blindness, deafness, paralysis, a withered hand and leprosy

So why don't we see disabled people in our churches? One reason is that our society traditionally approaches disability from the **medical model** of disability. This model sees disabled people as 'having a problem', which needs 'fixing or curing'. The emphasis is on what is 'wrong' with them, and they are treated as in need of healing or in need of pity and having to be cared for. This has often led to disabled people losing control over their lives – e.g. they have to go to bed when the carer can put them to bed, not when they choose to.

The better model, and most importantly, the model chosen by disabled people is the **social model** of disability. This looks at the environment to see what can be changed to allow a disabled person to take part on equal terms with non disabled people. Thus, a wheelchair user is not disabled in an environment where doors are wide, door furniture is within their reach, floors are flat and smooth and changes in level are accomplished by the use of ramps and lifts.

Using of the social model of disability has led to the growth of more independent living, where disabled people employ their own personal assistants to help with personal care, housework, going out, socialising, shopping etc. Thus the disabled person



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retains control of their lives and is able to make their own contribution to society and to church life.

Sermon 1

Let me paint a picture. If it were possible to gather together all the disabled people in the world into one nation, that mythical nation would number 650 million men, women and children. That's more than ten times the population of the United Kingdom. That nation would be the world's third largest country, after China and India. (World Health Organisation statistic)

That nation would have a number of unique characteristics. That nation would...

- have the least access to education - because disabled people receive little or no education in developing countries
- have the lowest proportion in the world of its population in employment
- be the poorest nation on earth, because disabled people are the poorest of the poor
- have the least access to any sort of transport - poverty again
- be the least evangelised nation with the lowest proportion involved in a church

[Disability Facts and Figures in the UK \(see separate page\)](#)

Don't forget, if each disabled person in the UK has only one person caring for them, there are 19m people affected by disability. Think about it, if your husband, wife, child or parent who is a wheelchair user can't get into your church, then the whole family can't get into the church.

As Christians, we need to understand the issues that both disabled people and carers face. The sad reality is that our churches often reflect society's lack of understanding and care and these people are not present.

Now you see why Jesus gave such a high priority to people with disabilities. There were so many of them! Let's think about Jesus' response - He gave a high priority to people with disabilities.



Sermon 2 based on 1 Peter 2:1-3

In the book 'Barrel of Fun' by J John is the following love letter lament:

Dearest Jimmy,

No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you!

Yours forever, Marie

P.S. And congratulations on winning the lottery.

Today we are thinking about love: love for God and love for people. As we will discover, while Marie's love for Jimmy was conditional, the love that Christian believers have for one another should be completely unconditional.

Peter, writing to young churches, opens chapter 2 of his first letter with these challenging words: 'Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.' [NIV]

The context of these verses is found in particular in 1:22: 'Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.'

In chapter 1 Peter urges Christians to live a life of holiness; now he urges love for one another. And he shows that what we are to do is grounded in what God has done.

We live in a particularly individualistic culture in the West and increasingly in other parts of the world. French mathematician René Descartes said 'I think, therefore I am' – a concept which became foundational in Western philosophy. As others have remarked, today's consumerist culture has adapted this as, 'I shop, therefore I am'. Either way, the focus is on 'I'.

It was former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who famously argued, 'There is no such thing as society', emphasising the trend for individualism. It is all too easy to individualise our Christian faith, considering it something exclusive and personal between God and us. And yet the Bible clearly calls us to Christian community. God's Word shows us the way to salvation, cleansing and maturity which fits us for a life of love lived out in community.

So often, disabled people feel on the edge of our church communities, neglected and unappreciated. Why do so many disabled people find attending and belonging to a church difficult? Surely church should be the first place that is accepting and welcoming? Sadly, sometimes it is the last place. When we plan our services and our outreach, there are so many good causes – discipling local young people, evangelism in South America or Africa, mission to the poor, relief for AIDS sufferers. These are all good and necessary, but it's reckoned that, on a global scale, disabled people remain the least evangelised in our society today. Why is that? If we are utterly honest with ourselves, might we say that they don't really feature on our radar? Or might we say we don't even know any disabled people? And that somehow we feel embarrassed, fearful or even just plain unconcerned?



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Clearly, Peter sees love for fellow Christians as the great mark of true holiness. He is not satisfied with mere tolerance or acceptance. Indifference will not do. He will have love – sincere love, without pretence or hypocrisy. But even sincerity is not enough; our love for one another must be deep and intense. In 1:22 Peter uses a word that means ‘stretched’ or ‘strained’. It’s the same term used to describe the intensity of Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane: ‘And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground’ (Luke 22:44). The deep heartfelt love that Peter urges is in no way artificial. It is the brotherly love that unites the family of God. Why? Because God’s love is the source of ours. The reality of his love is what kindles ours. Jesus’ love and compassion for all people, especially those on the edge of society, reflect God’s own heart for people on the margins.

To return to Peter’s letter, there is logic and reason in Peter’s writing. Since we have been saved, forgiven and made holy, we must live as if that’s real. We know we cannot deceive God, so why deceive others? We know that we dishonour God when we act or speak without love or concern or with spite, so we must not do it. Peter exhorts them to deepen and strengthen a love they already have. Paul urges the Thessalonians to love ‘more and more’ (1 Thessalonians 4:10) as God has taught them.

‘Grow up in your salvation,’ writes Peter. We have a sure and living hope that is our inheritance. It is kept for us and we are kept for it. Yet that hope is also future; we do not merely wait for it, we grow towards it, like flowers toward the sun. We serve Christ by serving the needs of others. Faith is purified, love is intensified, grace is tasted - as we are tested.

John Stott in his book ‘The Living Church’ states his vision or ‘dream’ for the church. Here’s an extract from that vision:

‘I have a dream of a church which is a caring church – whose congregation is drawn from many races, nations, ages and social backgrounds, and exhibits the unity and diversity of the family of God, whose fellowship is warm and welcoming, and never marred by anger, selfishness, jealousy or pride, whose members love one another with a pure heart fervently, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, and bearing one another’s burdens, which offers friendship to the lonely, support to the weak, and acceptance to those who are despised and rejected by society, whose love spills over to the world outside, attractive, infectious, irresistible, the love of God himself. I have a dream of a caring church.

‘I have a dream of a church which is a serving church – which has seen Christ as the Servant and has heard his call to be a servant too, which is delivered from self interest, turned inside out, and giving itself selflessly to the service of others, whose members obey Christ’s command to live in the world, to permeate secular society, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world...’

Is this a vision that we identify with? Is this the vision that we have a passionate desire to live out for ourselves?

David Palmer, Regional Outreach Leader, Torch Trust for the Blind



Key notes for a talk or discussion

based on the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37)

Here are some key points that can be used in a talk, presentation or discussion in churches, home groups, youth groups, Christian Unions or a school assembly.

Consider how you can use these key points to challenge, educate and motivate people to develop an ongoing disability ministry in your church and local community.

Please encourage other leaders and lay people to use these points whenever they have opportunities to raise awareness of the needs of disabled people.

1. Jesus is asked: **'What must I do to receive eternal life?'**

This question asks for specific practical advice: we are busy and we need direct answers, we want to 'tick the boxes' in our lives and be safe. But life doesn't always turn out how we expect. We may be called to die to our own ambitions and hopes before we can live. We may suffer or watch those around us suffer. We are confronted by lives that are affected by pain, disappointment, and incapacity.

Discussion/Meditation point: *What is our response to our own lives and to the lives of others when things don't go according to plan?*

2. Jesus asks the expert in religious law: **'What Does The Law Say?'**

Jesus knows that the law tells us to love God, and love our neighbour. He challenges the questioner, who wants easy answers, to look a bit deeper at his heart attitude. The answer is more about who we are than what we do. Our response has to be inspired and initiated by how we react and how we feel. As we consider the work of Livability and the needs of those facing disability, we need to ask ourselves what our inner attitudes are.

Do we care about those excluded from our church services? Does our compassion motivate us to act and meet needs in practical ways? Do we love our neighbour as ourselves?

3. **Recognising The Need**

The Samaritan was motivated to act on compassion. But first of all he had to recognise the person in need.

Are disabled people invisible to us?



4. Crossing The Street And Meeting Immediate Needs

Like the Levite and Priest before him, the Samaritan could have walked past with any number of excuses and chosen not to help or become involved. Once we recognise that someone needs our help, we too can choose not to respond. But Jesus challenges us to love in a practical way, to act on our compassion, and cross the street.

In meeting someone's needs we meet Jesus – we fulfil Jesus' commands, as He says in Matthew 25: 31-40 "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me".

Do we see Jesus in those who are different from us? Do we see the person first, or the disability?

5. The Goal Of Independence

The Samaritan met the injured man's immediate needs, but he went much further in providing money for his future needs, helping him until he was able to carry on his journey independently. In a similar way, Livability offers choice and independence to thousands of disabled people by providing wheelchair accessible homes, education, holidays, rehabilitation, respite and residential care.

Do we have the motivation to commit to our neighbour for their future lives, to meet a stranger and become a friend, to help someone gain independence and a sense of self worth?

6. Now Go And Do The Same

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells us that the Samaritan 'came to where the man was', identified himself with him, bound up his wounds and made himself responsible for him. So Christ, our Good Samaritan, comes to where we are, entering into our hearts and homes, showing compassion and binding up our wounds. What's more, He tells us to "Go and do likewise".

Do we ask Jesus to help us when we find it difficult to step out of our "comfort zone" and help others?

7. Things We Can Do

The Gospel challenges us to ask ourselves, '*what are things I can do to be a neighbour to disabled people?*'

How do we follow the example of the Good Samaritan in our own community - overcoming apathy, prejudice, fear of the unknown and showing practical, long-term love?

[\(See separate page: "More than just a Day"\)](#)



Some helpful Biblical references to disability

2 Samuel 9: David & Mephibosheth

Exodus 4: 10-12: Moses - God takes responsibility for disability

Luke 4: 14-21: Jesus' Messiahship

Luke 5: 17-26: Friends lower a paralysed man through the roof

The paralysed man's friends worked together to make sure he made contact with Jesus. The story makes it clear that the important issue Jesus dealt with was that of forgiveness of sins - the healing of the man served to illustrate that Jesus is God and has the power to forgive sins. It is not known whether the man remained fully healthy for the rest of his life, but the important thing is that he would be with Jesus in eternity.

Luke 14: 15-24: Filling God's house

This passage reveals the heart of God - God's house will be full when it includes marginalised people - those who are poor, disabled, despised etc. The passage does not say that the guests are to be healed, only that they are to be included.

Psalm 139: God designing us

In Psalm 139, we are exhorted to thank God for the way He made us.

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10: God's power revealed in weakness

It can be argued that a powerful reason for God choosing to use disability and weakness is so that it becomes clear that He is not dependent on the things which the world sees as weakness.

1 Corinthians 12: 22 – 23

This verse helps us determine the make up of our church body. Most churches have difficulty in ministering to disabled people simply because of some basic fears and lack of awareness. Moving past these attitudinal barriers and misunderstandings we'll discover the joy of caring for someone simply based on the preciousness of their souls, not on their physical attractiveness and intellectual capabilities or social position. The Theological model supports this understanding of people with disability.



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Prayers

Almighty God, we remember that you created us and made us all in your image.

Following your acts of creation, when you saw everything that you had made you described it as 'very good'. We celebrate the diversity of your created order. You have made us each as individuals according to your perfect will and purposes. You have blessed us with gifts and abilities.

Yet we live, each of us, with brokenness and limitation, failure and disappointment. We thank you that in Christ you came alongside us and entered our humanity.

Lord Jesus Christ we turn to you – you who know us better than we know ourselves - you who intercede for us.

We come to you, our Saviour – just as we are. We thank you for our salvation. Where there is brokenness, bring wholeness; where there is disease, bring healing; where there is repentance, bring forgiveness; where there is prejudice, bring acceptance; where there is injustice, bring justice.

You are a gracious and loving God, full of loving concern and deep compassion. We pray for your blessing on all those who experience disability. May we offer compassion and help without being patronising and smug towards those who face any form of disability.

We thank you for the wisdom and skill that you have entrusted to those in the caring professions. We thank you for the many organisations who work unceasingly to bring practical help and comfort to those who suffer. We pray that their efforts may bring relief and hope to many who feel despairing and helpless.

Encourage and give resources, we pray, to all those who seek to offer support and understanding to those who live with disability.

We pray for those who carry the responsibility of carers, whether they be family members or others.

Lord, today on this Disability Sunday, we especially pray for ... *(name those known to you who are disabled or who face the onset of disability)*.

Amen.



Intercessions

Lord Jesus, you reached out to the leper, the paralytic, the blind, the deaf and the needy. You gave friendship and hope to the lonely, you transformed the stranger into a friend, the outcast into a neighbour.

Show us Lord who our neighbours are, not just those who have found their own way to our church, or who look like us, or can do the things we do. Show us the people who are on your heart, needing love, help, encouragement and friendship.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Open our eyes to our forgotten, overlooked neighbours, so that we feel your love and compassion. Compel us to cross the street and invest our time, effort, love and money. Inspire us to bring others to you, carrying those who no longer have the strength to make their own way to your feet.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Thank you Lord for the work of Livability. Thank you that through them your love continues to be demonstrated. Help us to be your hands and feet in our communities and to continue their work with perseverance.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Turn our churches inside out, Lord. Help us to see those around us and cross the street from our buildings and comfortable boundaries to help others to live full and independent lives. Show us how to open our doors to those who you love, and welcome people with practical and genuine love. Help us to change our attitudes, our buildings and our hearts to become more like you.

Amen