

Sermon Notes 8-02-19

Mark 1:40-45
Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

41 Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

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1. What comes to mind when you think of the word "clean"?

A. Clean house, clean up, clean water, cleanliness is next to godliness, clean sweep, come clean, Mr. Clean, clean burning, clean oven, clean title, or perhaps mother's timeless instructions to always wear clean underwear.

B. Well, today we're talking about a different kind of clean.

- 1) Today we're talking about what it means to be clean inside and outside.
- 2) Clean not because we've rubbed and scrubbed but because God acting in Christ has chosen to make us so.

2. In Jesus' presence lives will be changed.

A. But as the story progresses, there are signs that such power will not go unchallenged.

B. The new and the old are bound to clash.

C. The new will not be contained by the old.

D. This passage records one of the most powerful and amazing miracles ever performed by Jesus.

- 1) In fact, this is one of only two recorded healings of lepers in the Gospels.
- 2) The other is in Luke 17:12-19.
- 3) Here, Jesus heals one leper, there He heals ten lepers.
- 4) The healing of the lepers was one of the signs that Jesus mentioned that proved He was the Messiah, Matt. 11:5.

E. In this wonderful account of the healing of this leprous man, we are given a glimpse into the heart of the Savior.

- 1) We are allowed to see His compassion and His power on full display.

3. The man's ailment is described as "leprosy" but, of course, that could have been any number of different things from acne to skin cancer.

A. And because people feared the worst, lepers had to live outside of town, apart from their family, and keep their distance from healthy people while supporting themselves through begging.

- 1) Whenever lepers went anywhere they had announce their presence by crying out, “Unclean, unclean!”
- 2) And if you touched a leper or were touched by one YOU were now unclean.
- 3) The only way lepers could be cured was if a priest deemed them so.

B. But worst of all, people equated leprosy with punishment for sin, which led to a lot of bad blood toward lepers.

- 1) You know, the attitude that said, “You’re getting what you deserve.”

C. So while we tend to focus on the physical consequences of leprosy in Jesus’ day, the total impact of being *unclean* had religious, social, and financial dimensions as well.

4. The text contains the short but powerful story of a leper coming to Jesus and making an unusual statement.

A. The leper says to Jesus, “If you want to, you can make me clean.”

- 1) Now what’s so unusual about this statement is that, for starters, it’s not really a request.
- 2) The leper doesn’t “ask” Jesus to be “healed.”
- 3) Instead, he announces what he believes, that, if Jesus chooses, Jesus can make him “clean.”
- 4) The leper's arrival and request press the issues of the good news squarely, “If you are willing, you have the power to make me clean”.

B. Here, Jesus will address the matter of “clean and unclean” in the particular realities of this world.

C. This issue is clear in the leper's question, which is not about cleansing and power in general, but about the power to make “me, the leper” clean.

5. But let’s get back to the leper’s statement.

A. He says to Jesus, “If you want to, you can make me clean.”

- 1) It’s not what we would expect.
- 2) We would expect a straightforward request to be healed.
- 3) But this is more of a statement about Jesus.

B. This particular leper obviously knew Jesus to be a healer, but more than that, he knew Jesus had the power to choose to make him “clean.”

- 1) So what’s the difference between being “healed” and being made “clean”?
- 2) Well, that’s really the crux of the story.

C. The leper’s statement tells Jesus that he believes Jesus can heal him, but more than that, he believes Jesus can restore him spiritually and socially.

- 1) He believes Jesus can make him whole again, return him to his family, allow him to go back to work, and back to worship God again in the Temple.
- 2) This leper wasn’t asking for mere healing, he wanted to be CLEAN!
- 3) He wanted to be a whole child of God again!
- 4) And that is exactly what Jesus does for him.
- 5) Through a simple touch the man is healed of his leprosy and his place is established within the community, within his family, within the religious life of God’s people.

6. Ultimately, the issue of the “good news” is whether it has the power to effect change in my life and yours.

A. The leper's real question is that if there is to be healing, it will be dependent on a God who “wills” that it be so.

1) The “if” in the leper’s question leaves the matter squarely up in the air.

B. As such, the leper reminds us that hearing about the arrival of Jesus as “good news” is contingent on finding in Jesus the realization of a God who actually “wills” that this healing be so.

1) But the leper’s words also recognize that this may take more than “will.”

2) The will to cleanse remains only a possibility until there is “power” to deliver on the promise of that will.

C. Therefore, the issue of power is central, for it stands both at the beginning and end of this story.

1) We can see that the concept of power eventually moves this story to the cross.

2) But we also see that the power of God is mixed with compassion for that is the greater motivator of Christ.

3) Jesus reaches out, touches the leper, and says, “I am willing.”

4) The “I will” of Jesus’ desire becomes the immediate reality for the leper in Jesus’ command: “Be made clean” (Mark 1:41-42).

D. In Jesus, “I will” is the power of the good news to change lives and the message of the “Aha Moment” of who Jesus really is.

1) Boundaries are now crossed.

- Issues of power are finally addressed.

- The unclean now becomes clean.

- The sick has become whole.

- And Jesus will get into trouble for all this!

2) The trouble comes in the refusal of this good news to be restrained, even by Jesus' own command.

3) Jesus gives the former leper two commands,

- “See that you don't tell anyone,”

- and “Go show yourself to the priest,”

- neither of which he obeys.

E. Instead, this man goes out and “preaches” the “word” mightily (Greek: *polla*; literally, “in many words”).

1) And his preaching is effective, so much so that Jesus becomes hampered in His own ministry (Mark 1:45).

7. This “Aha” moment in the story draws us into a number of tensions of discipleship and faith.

A. The leper's story makes clear that it is God's will for Jesus to touch, to cleanse, and to make whole is not just an imagination or a wish.

B. Instead, it is promise that Jesus has the power to intentionally touch the lives of broken and suffering people and then release them from the powers of the unclean in this world.

C. It also makes clear that the proclamation of this good news has the power, even today, to burst the boundaries of constraint that would keep this good word from being heard.

D. The story of this Jesus will get out!

8. As we said, this is a fascinating story if we let it end here.

A. But what makes this particular story interesting is not just the healing but the series of reversals that occur:

1) First, Jesus responds with compassion, which stands in stark contrast to the way everyone else has treated this leper.

- “Compassion” is a word that refers to “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.”

- When Jesus looked upon this poor, wretched man and saw his condition, His heart was stirred to action!

- In fact, the thought expressed here is “of love and compassion expressed to those in one’s own family.”

- Jesus loved this man like others would love a brother, or a son! What love!

2) Second, Jesus touches the leper.

- This not only reverses the “no touching” rule, but also the idea that the touch-er would now be rendered unclean by the touch-ee.

- But here the reverse is the case!

- In this case, it’s not the leper who is contagious, but Jesus!

- The leper doesn’t transmit his unclean-ness to Jesus, instead Jesus transmits his wholeness and holiness to the leper and makes him clean!

3) Third, this story began with the leper forced to live “outside of the camp” (Lev. 13:46) and ends with his restoration to the community while Jesus is forced to move outside the town.

4) And fourth, Jesus tells the former-leper to keep quiet but the former-leper just can’t and spreads the good news.

B. Jesus loves reversals and much of his call to us is to see where his touch in our lives turns things upside down for the better.

1) Which makes one wonder about how much of our lives have been “infected” with Christ?

2) And how are we spreading the health, the wholeness, the healing, the cleanliness that we have been blessed with.

3) You see, unlike the leper, most of us experience Jesus’ touch not once but many time over the course of our lives.

4) We are made clean, we experience healing, we are forgiven, made whole, and have become holy, not just once but repeatedly.

C. For our part, we are called to consider what it means to be made clean.

1) But that can be tricky because some of us are content to live with our disease.

2) Our disease has become “normal” for us and we can’t imagine life without it.

D. The thing about being made clean is that it reverses our lives, and turns us upside down for the better.

1) Too often people want a Christian faith that will make the world a better place but that will not change them in the process.

2) We fear change, especially reversal change.

3) But that’s exactly what makes the good news so radical, so life altering, so wonderful!

E. To know that God in Christ *chooses* to reach out and touch our lives not once, but repeatedly throughout a lifetime that we might know what it is to be clean is.

1) that’s the heart and soul of the Good News!

2) It means we are given the gift of a fresh start not once but many times over!

3) It means we are blessed with the sure and certain knowledge that

- Today we have all been touched by divine love;
- Today we are made whole and holy;
- Today we have been reunited with our best selves;
- Today the road out of estrangement is cleared;
- Today we called into Hope;
- Today we are made clean!

Amen.