**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 3-6-2022
Loving on a Leper**

Friends, I was so glad to see many of us at our Ash Wednesday Worship service this week held at Dillsburg Community Church.

While it is always a blessing to gather for worship, it is an additional joy to worship with other sisters and brothers in Christ from other churches as well. While there are many churches, in God’s eyes all true believers in Jesus are united together.

And the Ash Wednesday worship gathering was a great reminder that there is joy in being connected to others, being in fellowship with others. It is so important. Over the last 2 years, we have all experienced, to one extent or another, this has been a challenge. There has been much separation and isolation.

But as the Lord says near the beginning of the Bible, “**it is not good for man to be alone**.” Truly, we were meant for connection and community and fellowship. And I am so glad we are moving towards that again.

But when we look at God’s Word, we learn that the concepts of separation and isolation are not new ones. This was very true when it came to a disease called leprosy.

A leper would have been considered anyone with an infectious skin disease. Today there are different names given to specific conditions, but the modern-day condition that we think of when it comes to leprosy is now called Hanson’s Diseases.

And as difficult has it has been for us to quarantine or have loved loves quarantine for a couple of weeks or so, those that were dealing with leprosy would have no such time frame. It was indefinitely, until it was proven that they are now well.

Lepers would often live in their own housing areas, called colonies. And at a time when someone’s health was viewed as a measure of God’s favor, lepers were seen as cursed by God. Certainly, this was not the truth, but it was how they understood sickness at the time.

There are several stories in Scripture of God powerfully healing individually from this disease that afflicted many. There is the story of Naaman from the Old Testament and the story of Jesus healing a group of 10 lepers.

But today our focus is an amazing encounter between Jesus and a man with leprosy. This encounter is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s Gospels, but Matthew places it after Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. And since we just completed Jesus’ amazing sermon, I think that it’s most fitting to hear from Matthew’s account this morning.

It is found in Matthew 8:1-4

**1 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2A man with leprosy[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+8%3A1-4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23348a)**] came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”**

**3Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. 4Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”**

While we do not know what miracles this man has heard of Jesus performing, whether it was turning the water into wine or Jesus’ casting out of demons, or perhaps other healing or miracle, this man has put his confidence in Jesus, believing that he can make him well and cleanse him of his disease.

Perhaps you can picture this scene. This man coming to Jesus and then knelling before Him, showing his heart of surrender and dependence on Jesus.

He then says “**Lord**.” He is calling Jesus his Master, His Lord. He appears to be publicly acknowledging Jesus as his Lord before everybody present.

Now this took some serious courage for this leprous man to do this. Why? Because lepers were outcasts and were expected to stay away from others. But this leper had been touched by the love and power of Jesus and it compelled him to boldly come near to Jesus.

But as much as this man knew that Jesus had the power to heal him, he did not know if Jesus would help him. And so this unnamed man tells his Lord and ours, **“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”**

And then Jesus does something truly remarkable, ***he reaches out His hand and touches the man***. “**I am willing” he says. Be clean**!”

And we read that *immediately* he was cleansed of his leprosy.

Friends, beginning today and for the next several weeks, we are taking a look at the hands of Jesus. Throughout the gospels we see Jesus using His hands for godly purposes. And each week, as we ponder Jesus using His hands for good, it will help us to consider how we can use our hands for good and godly purposes as well.

In this beautiful story, what is most remarkable is Jesus reaching out and touching this leprous man. That was unheard of at that time. Leprosy was considered a very serious contagious disease, definitely more so that covid-19 has been, and yet Jesus chooses not to keep His social distance from this man, but instead to touch him.

We know from many examples in the gospels that Jesus did not need to touch someone to heal them. There are several examples of Jesus healing people from a distance. So why touch this leper?

I believe that part of his healing was in that touch. While Matthew tells us that this man was immediately cleansed of his leprosy, which is amazing, I believe that the touch of Jesus’ hand healed this man in a different way.

It healed his emotions. It healed his sense of belonging and acceptance. This touch of Jesus helped him to feel fully human again.

And that’s not all that’s amazing about this touch of Jesus. According to the law, to touch a leper would make someone ritually unclean. To be made unclean would prohibit someone from entering a holy place, such as the Temple in Jerusalem, for a particular period of time.

But Jesus, who is holiness Himself, was willing to be made ritually unclean in the process of healing this man.

And this reminds us how on Good Friday Jesus was willing to take on humanity’s sins or to make people spiritually clean before God.

Friends, in the Scriptures, the physical healings of Jesus are all meant to point to something far greater and more important. And that is the healing of the heart. The spiritual cleansing of a person’s soul.

I believe that Jesus was doing far more than healing this man of his leprosy, He was also healing his mind and cleansing his heart. And much of this was by Jesus’ decision to touch this leper.

And Jesus’ healing of him was immediate. The immediate healing in this man’s body reveals to us that Jesus can immediately clean the inner person when the person trusts in Him.

After this instant healing, Jesus then says to the now former leper, “**See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”**

In the Old Testament Law, God gives instructions on what someone is to do after they are healed or cleansed from their leprous condition. This involves going to the priest and showing them that they are now well and then making a certain offering or gift to testify to the validity of that healing and now being made publicly clean again before the community.

And so Jesus instructs this man to do what he was expected to do according to the Law. As this man would do this, it would demonstrate to the priest that Jesus has the power to cleanse even lepers. And it would also demonstrate that Jesus was honoring the Law of Moses by having the man do what the law instructed him to do.

Jesus also told him not to tell anyone on his way to the priest. This was because Jesus didn’t want him to have more difficulty traveling from town to town in His timing, as the crowds would grow at a pace that would make it more difficult for Him.

Sisters and brothers, as we consider this amazing story from the gospels, what are the main things for us to take with us for our lives today?

**First, this story should help us grow in our love for Jesus. Jesus’ actions, particularly in touching the leper, reveal that He is a God that comes to us in our need and in our brokenness. Jesus is our healer in every sense of the word, whether the physical healing happens now or in heaven.**

**He will immediately heal us from our sin when we trust in Him and come to Him. He alone can make us spiritually clean and pure in the presence of God.**

Perhaps you can think of when Jesus has touched you. How He has warmed your heart to the gospel. How we ministered to you in a difficult time? How we restored you in some way?

(this reminds me of the hymn “He Touched Me’

“*Shackled by a heavy burden, nearth a load of guilt and shame, then the hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same. He touched me, O he touched me, and O the joy that floods my soul! Something happened, and now I know, he touched me and made me whole*.”

And he continues to touch and transform us to shine more and more like Him in this world.

Verse 2

*Since I met this blessed Savior, since He cleansed and made me whole, I will never cease to praise Him’ I’ll shout it while eternity rolls.*

Everybody now “*He touched me, O he touched me, and O the joy that floods my soul! Something happened, and now I know, he touched me and made me whole*.

So whatever is going on in your life, I exhort you to draw near to Jesus and he will continue to touch you with His grace and His mercy.

**And second, this story reminds us that Jesus invites us to reach out to those that are considered outcasts or unclean in some way**.

We live in a very broken and hurting world. The Lord wants us to be proactive and willing to reach out and touch those that are struggling. Jesus loves to work through people that are reliant on Him.

Who comes to your mind that may feel like a leper today? Whether it is a physical or an emotional or a spiritual challenge or difficulty, how can we use our hands as instruments of righteousness in this world?

Perhaps it could be by writing an encouraging note or by giving them a gift or by offering them a hug or by calling them up or knocking on their door and inviting them to do something with you. Our hands are to be instruments of righteousness in this world for our Lord to use in whatever way He sees fit.

Let us pray…

Resources:

D.A. Carson – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version – Matthew Chapters 1 through 12.

The Gospel According to Matthew – Leon Morris