

Text: Mark 1:40-45  
Date Preached: Sunday, February 12, 2006  
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford  
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Grace and peace be unto you from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ!

"Honey, the post office just called," Jim's wife told him when he arrived home from work. "They asked if you could come down and talk with them." "Okay," Jim answered. "I wonder what this is all about." Jim asked himself as he headed out the door.

When Jim arrived at the post office, the postmaster greeted him by saying, "Mr. Smith, thank you for coming right in." The postmaster continued on, "The reason I have asked you to come down is about the envelope that I have here." He continued on, "Now a lot is expected of the post office, but this is most amazing delivery that we have ever been asked to make..."

Now, lying on the counter, Jim saw what looked like a large envelope with some scribbling on it. When the postmaster held it up, Jim recognized immediately that the mystery letter was decorated with his 5-year-old son's handwriting. In his son's hand, it was addressed: TO: GOD; FROM: BEN. Curious, Jim opened the envelope up and out fell a flat dead goldfish.

It is at that point that Jim remembered...When Ben's goldfish had died the day before, Jim had told his youngest son that they would send the goldfish back to God. Now when Jim said this, he simply thought that they would give Ben's beloved goldfish a simple burial in the garden- but obviously Ben had a better idea. (Clergy Talk, Feb. 2003)

Like the leper in today's reading, this young boy desired direct contact with God. So instead of burying his fish in some flower pot or even worse yet, flushing it down the toilet, he personally mails his fish to God.

Unlike the young boy from today's reading, many of us do not know how to approach God. Many things can transpire to keep us from enjoying a personal relationship with our Lord. Maybe we worry that we are not worthy to talk to God, we might think that God doesn't care about us, we might even think to ourselves, "Yeah, God hears me...but he isn't going to do anything." Or maybe we have prayed before and not liked the outcome- maybe you or your loved one's health didn't seem to improve, maybe the relationship you prayed for wasn't reconciled, maybe you didn't win the lottery.

I am sure that all of us can echo the sentiment that we have had prayers that have gone unanswered. If not, I am sure that we would have all driven in BMW's, we would be 10 pounds lighter, in perfect health, and the world would be at peace.

Of course, this is not the case. However, one of the cornerstones of our faith is that we are called to not lose heart or hope. We are to not curse God for not making our every prayer come seemingly true. No, rather God calls us to vigorously and persistently pray. (Mtt 18:1-8) The truth of the matter is that God hears our every prayer- and through faith God answers every prayer. (Mtt. 18:22) Of course (as we all know), God doesn't always give us what we want, but he does give us what we need. (Mtt. 6:25-34)

Today in our gospel reading we find a man who desperately needs restoration and healing. (Mk. 1:40-45) Now this man whom is in need of healing is suffering from leprosy. Now, in the First Century world, the disease of "leprosy" took many forms- however, one thing is quite clear: the life of a leper was one of exclusion. As to the difficult and painful life of someone with leprosy, consider what the Bible has to say about their treatment as found in the book of Leviticus:

The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang, and shall cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease: he is unclean; he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside of camp. (Lev. 13:45-46 RSV)

This man needed healing- he needed restoration. Now we are not told what compelled him to approach Christ, but something powerful brought him to his knees in front of Jesus to ask for healing and restoration.

As this man with leprosy is on his knees in front of Jesus he states, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Now at this statement, we are told that Christ was "filled with compassion" and healed the man.

Now, after the man had been cured and healed, Christ sets about doing something that we most likely find strange.

Christ warns the man, "See that you do not tell this to anyone..." (Mk.1:43)

That's kind of odd, isn't it? After all Christ is the Messiah- he has come to gather us, teach us, and redeem us. Why on earth wouldn't he want these great works of his to spread throughout the countryside? Why wouldn't he want everyone to know of his power?

After some reflection, I think a few reasons present themselves in the gospels. Firstly, Christ didn't want to be regarded as a magician or miracle healer. For reference, we have all seen these people on TV and they were around during Christ's time as well. Simply, put Christ wasn't like that.

The second reason that Jesus has for asking this man to keep his healing hush-hush is that Christ wasn't about trying to WOW! people into belief. Christ's ministry was one of word and sacrifice- not of pomp and ceremony. As St. Paul writes, "...Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Rom.10:17)

Today, like that man suffering from leprosy 2000 years ago we come before Christ on bended knee and ask for healing and restoration. We suffer from ill-health, broken relationships, bad decisions, you name it...We need to be healed. Each of our lives cries out for the healing touch of Jesus Christ.

And to us who cry out for healing, Christ says to us through the sacrifice of the cross, "I am willing."

But there is an area of our life where we differ from that leper. Now the secret is out, God wants us to run through the countryside proclaiming his great works and compassion. He wants us to share with others the love we have experienced.

He is willing. Are you?

Amen