



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

“I am willing; be cleansed”

Mark 1:40-45

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“Isolation, quarantine”: they are suddenly far more familiar terms than a year ago!

Leprosy was and is a feared disease. With modern medicine the disease can be halted quite easily, but formerly the only control was permanent isolation to prevent its spread to others. That was devastating as the victim had to leave all normal society, family and work and live alone or in a leper colony. There they would essentially be dependent of charity for their survival.

Jesus and the Leper

In the gospel reading Mark illustrates the breadth of Jesus’ authority. Cleansing a leper was significant because the Jews believed that only God could heal leprosy or raise the dead.

One can understand the fear of the people when a leper approached Jesus. It would be a deep-seated fear. There would be concern lest they contracted the disease. Think about how frightened people are in NZ when there is a community case COVID. For them leprosy would be far worse - a living death.

Somehow, this leper had gained the idea that Jesus could cleanse him from leprosy. He dares to approach, he dares to believe that Jesus is powerful enough to cleanse a leper. With amazing trust he says, “If you will, you can make me clean.” What a remarkable development in his thinking – to come to believe what would always have been impossible would possible for this man. What is Jesus’ response? “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”

Oh the joy of the miracle. How well the film conveys it. A leper was unclean. To touch him not only risked infection but would immediately make the other person unclean as well. Yet when Jesus touched him, the leper was cleansed because Jesus is more powerful than disease. He cleanses all who come to him.

Geoff Wiklund is a Kiwi Pentecostal pastor who told me of a time when he was ministering overseas. A man asked him to pray for leprosy. Geoff simply laid hands on him and commanded healing. The man was healed. Afterwards, he asked Geoff, why he dared to touch him when he had infectious leprosy. Geoff said, he hadn’t known, he simply did what Jesus did. Well that man got his immediate family and all of them were healed too.

In the gospel account the man was so overjoyed that he told everyone and created such a stir that Jesus could no longer minister in towns but had to stay out in the open countryside. He had been told to keep quiet but that was for that particular circumstance. It does not apply now – on the contrary we are to tell people about Jesus and what he has done for us. When we do, we give him the glory that belongs to him.

How would you respond to such an event? How do you respond to the wonder of the salvation you have experienced? You want to tell other people. If we do tell people about Jesus, they too will come to him from everywhere.

Let's focus on verse 41: "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' " **Compassion, touch, willingness, command.**

Compassion

This is very significant. Jesus was filled with compassion. It is a strong word. It means being moved in the depths of your belly. Jesus was deeply moved with compassion for the man. This also happened when he healed the two blind men, when he fed the 4000, when he raised Lazarus. Jesus is not uncaring for us. He is not heartless about our distress. He is moved with compassion.

Touch

This compassion moves him to do the unthinkable – he reaches out and touches the leper. To touch him was to risk being infected! No one would have touched this man since the disease was discovered. He had to stay clear of them and call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn them off. And now Jesus had reached out and touched him! What an act of loving inclusion for a rejected outcast.

Yet of course, when Jesus touched the leper, he was cleansed, so he was no longer a leper. The power of Jesus' life and holiness could 'out-touch' leprosy. Life would not be killed. Purity would not be violated. Rather life and purity surged into the man and destroyed the leprosy.

Willingness

And note the words which accompany his actions: "I am willing, be clean!" "If you will" – "I am willing." "You can make me clean" – "Be clean!" His response is full of willingness: Yes you are right I can. Your uncertainty is needless, **I am willing.**

Command

And so the command is given – Be clean. Here again is an example of Jesus simply commanding healing to happen. Be clean. Last week we heard he dismissed an unclean spirit with a simple command, this week he commands a cleansing from leprosy.

God is willing to heal

I want to focus on the willingness of Jesus to heal.

The leper says, "If you will..." and Jesus replied, "I am willing." Hear that church, "**I am willing!**"

Is God willing to heal? When we pray for healing should we preface it with, "If it be your will"? When we pray and we don't see healing come, is it right to conclude that God does not wish to heal?

This is an important area and obviously touches on great griefs, disappointments and even, for some, abandonment of faith. Please don't think that I am being triumphalistic. I struggle with failure too. I tell true stories of healings to encourage you and to build your faith. But I also struggle with the times when there is no healing, when I am not healed, when those I love stay sick or even die.

I do not have all the answers, but I have found that when I pray for healing some people get healed. Not all but some. And if I don't pray no one gets healed. Some of you here have experienced healings and from non-trivial illnesses. Some is better than none!

So, what do we conclude about God's readiness to heal? Let's explore five points together.

1. In this account, Jesus clearly states he is willing. He is moved with compassion for the man. Some people suggest that Jesus only worked miracles to make a point. But we are told the motive here – it is compassion.
2. Through the gospels he never refuses to heal anyone who comes to him. So we read:
 - Jesus healed many who had various diseases. (Mk 1:34)
 - They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and **all who touched him were healed.** (Mk 6:56)
 - Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing **every** disease and sickness. (Mt 9:35)

Some people say that he demands faith of people before he will heal. Actually, no one is turned down in the gospels. Where he raises the issue of faith, I think he helps them past the obstacle of unbelief which can be a real barrier.

3. When he sent his disciples out to preach and heal in Luke 9 & 10, there was no instruction to hold back on healing. There was no qualification about whom they should heal.
4. If you go out to preach or witness to the gospel and the person is not converted straightaway, would you conclude it was not God's will for him to be saved so you had better stop? No, you would keep on or at least you know you ought to, because we know it is not God's will that any man perish. So why do we stop so quickly when it comes to praying for healing and conclude it is not God's will?
5. If you think God does not want to heal you because that would be good for you, why do you still go to the doctor about the condition? Are you trying to overturn God's best will for you? No, you know the sickness is not good and so you try to alleviate it.

What is happening in our thinking is that we don't understand how healing works and we are jumping to an easy conclusion that lets ourselves off the hook. But compare it to electricity. Suppose you had an electrical appliance – say a kettle - which didn't work. Would you immediately decide that the national grid has collapsed and no electricity is being generated to power your kettle? It could be that, but surely you would check it is switched on, plugged in, the wall socket is turned on. You might check the fuse or suspect the element had burnt out before you concluded that the source of electricity had failed.

Deciding God does not want to heal is like saying the generators on the Waikato and Manapouri and all the rest have stopped because my kettle won't get hot!

In my experience, there are many ways in which healing can be blocked – to name the most common: unforgiveness is very effective at stopping healing – even not forgiving yourself amazingly enough! Belief that God would not heal me is another. There are other possibilities. I don't have time to explore them in a sermon and I don't know all the answers anyway. But Helen and I are ready to discuss and pray and seek answers together with you as we try to find ways forward.

Summary

In summary, we have seen the importance of trust and obedience which are components of faith. We have seen that compassion has played a part in these healings.

We have I hope seen that Jesus was and is willing to heal – the problem does not lie with his willingness but perhaps more often in our ability to connect and receive from him.

Once again, if you think I am being triumphalist that is not my heart attitude. I have seen many healings and I long for you all to see them, be part of them, receive them and bless others with them too. Later this year, we will again offer training in a basic approach to praying for healing. Why not take advantage of that opportunity to grow?

Be encouraged! Be blessed! And lean into God for healing – for yourself and for others.