



## Sermon

11<sup>th</sup> February 2024

### God is willing – Are We?

2 Kings 5:1-14; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 1:40-45

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As we look at the scriptures today I have two points: God is willing – Are we?

#### ***The Brave Evangelist***

The little girl knew more than most of us! What little girl? The slave girl in the account of the Naaman. She told her master that there was a prophet in Israel who could cleanse a leper!

What a courageous child. There she was a slave – subject to corporeal punishment or even capital punishment at her master's whim yet she suggested her master seek healing from the prophet in Israel. A compassionate heart even for the one who kept her as a slave. That was real courage.

But what if there were no healing? What if the divisions of war meant Naaman were turned away? There is no other account of a leper being healed in the Old Testament. So why should she think Elisha would be able to cleanse him? And if he were not healed - what anger would be visited upon her then? She must have had some inspiration and she trusted which is a major part of faith.

A compassionate and courageous girl indeed! She was willing to tell people about what God could do.

#### ***God is willing to heal***

Leprosy is and was a feared disease. Where modern medicine is available the disease can be halted. Traditionally, the only control was isolation to try to prevent the spread of the disease.

It was devastating for the victim who 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.

In first century culture, the disease and any similar-looking skin problem was a terrifying prospect. All normal life was finished, only exclusion, poverty and progressive wasting lay ahead.

One can imagine the fear then of the people and the disciples when a leper approached Jesus. There would be deep-seated fear lest the disease passed onto them.

Somehow, this man with leprosy gained the idea that Jesus could, if he were willing, cleanse him from leprosy. The common view was that only God could cleanse from leprosy. So this leper's request was even more startling. He dared to approach, he dared to believe that Jesus was powerful enough to cleanse a leper. He risked so much to approach him and to beg Jesus on his knees,

“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. [v40-42]

Do you hear Jesus' response?

“If you will” --- “I am willing.”

“You can make me clean” --- “Be clean!”

His response if full of willingness: Yes, you are right I can. Your uncertainty is needless, **I am willing.**

Then Jesus did the unthinkable – he reached out and touched the leper. To touch a leper was to make yourself religiously unclean. To touch him was to risk being infected and to becoming a leper yourself! No one would have touched this man since the disease was discovered. And now Jesus had reached out and touched him!

Yet of course, when Jesus touched the leper, he was cleansed, so he was no longer a leper. Jesus' sheer 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.

And so, the command is given – "Be clean!" Here, as always, Jesus simply commanded the healing to happen.

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, in some, abandonment of faith. I am not being triumphalistic - I struggle with failure too. I tell true stories of healings to give God the glory that deserves and to encourage you to expect healing. 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 us here have been healed and even from non-trivial illnesses. Some is better than none!

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

1. In this account, Jesus clearly states he is willing. He is moved with compassion for the man.
2. Through the gospels he never refuses to heal anyone who comes to him:
  - Jesus healed many who had various diseases [Mark 1:34].
  - They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and **all who touched him were healed** [Mark 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. [Matthew 9:35]
  - Some people teach that he demands faith of people before he will heal. But actually, I think what is happening is that he leads them past an obstacle of unbelief. None of them is turned down.
3. When he sends his disciples out to preach and heal, there is no instruction to hold back on healing. There is no qualification about whom they should heal.
4. If you think God does not want to heal you, why do you still go to the doctor about the condition? You know it is not good and so you try to alleviate it.

When we resort to saying God does not want to heal me, we may be taking the easy way out - we are jumping to an easy conclusion that lets us off the hook. But compare it to electricity. Suppose you turn on a light and it doesn't work. Do you immediately decide that the national grid has collapsed and no electricity is being generated to power your light? It could be that, but surely you would check it is switched on, plugged in, the wall socket is turned on. You would check the bulb and then the circuit breaker before you decided the power was off. Yet deciding God does not want to heal is like saying the generators on the Waikato and Manapouri and all the rest have stopped!

In my experience, there are many ways in which healing can be blocked – to name just a couple: unforgiveness is very effective at stopping healing, belief that God would not heal me is another. But there are many other possibilities as well. I don't have time to explore them in this 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 folk as we try to find ways forward.

### ***Are we willing to obey?***

Jesus instructed the man not to tell people but to go and show the priest his skin so he could be ruled 'clean.' This would be a testimony to the priests. In the law of Moses they had the provision to test for a cleansing

from leprosy but they had never seen it before. However, the man is so overjoyed that he tells everyone and creates such a stir that Jesus can no longer minister in towns but had to stay out in the open countryside.

He was not obedient and so he hindered Jesus in his ministry. The command to keep quiet was for that particular time – not for all time. It does not apply now – on the contrary we are to tell people about Jesus. The irony is that Jesus told him not to tell others and he did. He tells us to tell others and we don't. We are to tell of his wonderful deeds in our lives just as the slave girl was willing to tell her master about Elisha.

### ***The Disciplined Messenger***

Let's turn our attention back to Paul in the Epistle reading. The context of this passage is Paul defending his behaviour as an apostle against unjust attack. He concludes by likening the practice of his ministry to the training and competing of an athlete. That was a relevant example for the Corinthians. Every two years they hosted the Isthmian Games – a local version of the Olympics. Athletes have to be disciplined if they are to succeed.

v25: Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.

Paul says he does not run aimlessly – he is disciplined and purposeful. He imposes discipline on himself to direct his efforts towards the good purposes of his calling.

Have you thought about your life in those terms? You may have been strongly disciplined for a time perhaps through your schooling and university days when striving for success. Maybe in your work or service to others. Do you have a purpose which directs you now? Is there something which makes discipline worthwhile? Which gives you an aim?

May I suggest the gospel has that challenge for all of us? You don't have to be ordained to be committed to the gospel. If Jesus Christ has met you and claimed you for his own; if he has saved you and redeemed you; if he has enrolled you in his kingdom project – then you have a purpose, a calling and a reason to focus your life with discipline.

The little slave girl fulfilled a mission in spite of being captive in a foreign land. The leper did not obey and so hindered Jesus' ministry. Paul set himself to follow diligently after Christ. What about us? Are we willing to obey, to be disciplined in our walk with the Lord?

### ***Our Corporate Life - Parish Review***

It is true also of us as a body. We have a calling and a purpose to spread the gospel in this part of the world.

We have worked hard in previous years to define our vision, mission and values.

Our parish vision statement is: **“Growing in Faith, Love and Mission.”** Faith is directed towards God. Love is for each other and beyond. Mission is focused on those who don't yet know the Lord. We intend to keep growing in each dimension.

Our mission statement is: **“To glorify God and fulfill God's purposes by: bringing people to faith in Christ; deepening our discipleship; being equipped for ministry and mission in the name of Christ.”**

And our values statement is: **“We are a welcoming Church family that gathers for vibrant and joyful worship, studying God's word, prayer, and community life in which we experience support and a sense of belonging as we seek to live out our Christian faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.”**

We are about to embark on the City to City review process. Our CTC Consultant is the Revd Cameron Munro. He is an Anglican clergyman from Adelaide with extensive experience in parish ministry. He will visit us at the end of the month to experience a service with us and to meet us face to face and interview vestry.



The review starts with a Parish survey in which you can express your views about the parish and our direction. This is an anonymous survey. Later today we will send an email with a link to fill it in online. We have this week to complete it. It needs to be completed in a week to give Cameron time to review it before he visits us.

For those who cannot do it online, there is the option to take a paper form after the service and return it next week.

Please attend to the survey this week. We do want each person's opinion and insight.

May God bless us together as we aim to keep growing in love, faith and mission.

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