

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

A TOUCH, A WORD, A HEALING

Mark 1:40-45

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, 44 saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

DIAGNOSIS: Healed from Disease

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Unclean*

The sickness was out in the open for anyone to see. In this case it was leprosy, but it easily could have been another kind of disease. What we know for certain is that it marked the unnamed man in this story as a disease-carrier and an outcast. After all, the law commanded "the person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be

disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (Lev. 13:45-46).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Sick Inside

On the surface the leper's sickness mirrors the inward sickness of the heart that is shared by all. Every morning, the heart wakes fearing the disease's power. Even though it is unwelcome, it is what the heart depends on and trusts. The leper is defined by his leprosy. Even those who look healthy on the outside and aren't forced to live on the edges of society have a similar sickness. It's the sin that is constant and that won't go away by our own attempts to heal ourselves.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Cast Out

When our hearts beg and kneel before other gods, whether they are physical illnesses or our own sin-sick souls, our status as outcasts will become permanent. Leprosy or another disease may have put us under quarantine, but our lack of trust in God will keep us there. We will not remain isolated from him, however. Instead, facing the Almighty God, we will experience the full force of his wrath.

PROGNOSIS: Healed for Proclamation

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Be Made Clean!

What Jesus does in this lesson for the sake of the one leper offers a preview of what God will do on the cross for the sake of the world. The cross brings us back from isolation and restores our relationship with God. After the leper approached Jesus on his knees, begging, "If you choose, you can make me clean" (v. 40), Jesus was "moved with pity" (v. 41). In his compassion, Jesus "stretched out his hand and touched him." Jesus did the unthinkable. He touched a leper. But instead of Jesus becoming infested with the disease, he gave the gift of

healing to the sick one. On the cross, Jesus stretched out his hands in healing and compassion again. But this time, he willingly became infected with our sin. He took it on himself and gave us his health and life. He changed our future from endless sickness to everlasting life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *He was Made Clean*

In his encounter with Jesus, the leper is given something new to wake up to—something new for his heart to trust. Jesus said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” (v. 41). Mark reports, “Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean” (v. 42). Jesus spoke and it happened. The man can now trust the power of Jesus’ words to affect him and to change his future. He no longer has to rely on his illness to define him. The healed man doesn’t even need to cling to the rituals commanded by the law of Moses or show himself to the priests as proof that he has been healed (v. 44). Jesus’ outstretched hand, words of compassion, and immediate healing are all the proof his heart needs.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Going Out*

The leper is turned into a preacher. Even though Jesus insists the healed man go and show himself to the priests, the man goes out and starts sharing the news about what Jesus has done (v. 45). The one who is freed from his sickness goes out “to proclaim it freely.” Jesus himself had told his disciples before today’s passage begins, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do” (1:38). After being healed by Jesus, the former leper also spreads the word. He was healed from his disease. He was healed for proclamation so that others could hear the good news. And his proclamation is so effective that “Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter” (v. 45).