

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, Mark 1:40-:45

Today we encounter a man who was so diseased that he was completely cut off from the society that he wished to be a part of. Our Gospel tells us about Jesus's encounter with a man who had a serious skin disease, serious enough that the fear that he would contaminate others meant that he was cut off from the rest of society.

This man comes to Jesus, begging to be healed.

How does Jesus react to this man?

Our reading tells us that he was "moved with pity."

Jesus shows deep concern and true compassion towards this man, he stretches out his hand and touches him, a shocking act of kindness given that most people would have been so afraid of this man's illness that they wouldn't have even gone near him. As a result of this the man was instantly cleansed and healed.

Jesus saw this man's situation, reacted to it with love, and then rescued him from his disease and from his isolation.

There's also an interesting translation issue with this story, something that lets us take another look at Jesus's actions on behalf of this man. Some of the early Greek texts of the Gospel of Mark do say that Jesus was "moved with pity" when he saw this man's condition. But some of them say that Jesus was angry when he saw this man's illness.¹ This points us towards Jesus being so affected by what this man has to suffer through, that anger rose up in him as a result.

Ultimately we probably can't know which of these is the best translation, did Jesus feel compassion towards this man or anger on his behalf? But these are certainly

¹ See pages 102-104 of the book "The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary" by Ben Witherington.

not mutually exclusive things, and both of them point us towards how much Jesus desired what was best for this man. And as a result this man was the beneficiary of one of the many miracles worked by Jesus in the New Testament.

But, while Jesus cured this man and in his power Jesus has worked many other miracles for his church since then, many more of the seriously ill at the time of this story and in the 2,000 years since have gone unhealed. Some who were blind were given sight by Jesus (Matthew 9:27-:31, 11:4-:5, 12:22-:23, 20:29-:34, 21:14, Mark 8:22-:26, 10:46-:52, Luke 4:16-:21, 7:18-:23, 18:35-:43, John 9:1-:41), most of the blind never receive this from him. There were those who were crippled and lame who Jesus told to stand up and walk (Matthew 9:1-:8, 11:4-:5, 15:29-:31, Mark 2:1-:12, Luke 5:17-:26, Luke 7:18-:23, John 5:1-:17), most people in that situation will die without ever having been given that gift.

Does this mean that Jesus only has compassion on some, that it is only the sufferings of a select few which move him to anger?

By no means.

God has promised that the dead will rise (Isaiah 26:19), the deaf will hear, the blind will see (29:18, 35:5), the lame will walk (35:6), the oppressed will go free (58:6, 61:1), and that those who mourn will be comforted (62:2).

All these promises were given to us in the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

The deliverance and healing that Jesus shared with this beggar is a taste of God's universal promise. What was given to this man has, through God's promise, been offered to every single person who has ever lived on this earth.

This universal promise has been made, but it's pretty clear that it hasn't been completely delivered on. But if God has made a promise like that, we can trust in him to deliver on it. So how's he going to do it? When are we going to receive this?

The Nicene Creed says that "we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." St. Paul's letter to the Romans says that all of "creation itself" will be "set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Romans 8:21)

The world as it now will not last forever, and this is very good news. At the end of time when the world as we know it ends, and everything is remade according to God's will, the promises made by the prophet Isaiah will be fulfilled for all those who are united to God.

Now let's imagine for a moment that we are among those who do receive this final gift. And let's also imagine that the man who Jesus healed is also among those who receive this. If we were to ask him what was a greater gift, being cured of his illness while on earth or being able to share in the final redemption of God's people, what do you think he would say?

The greatest gift God has offered to anyone is the opportunity to share in the final redemption, resurrection, and healing that will be given to his people.

The gift of a temporary miraculous healing is a pretty small thing compared to this. When it comes to these lesser gifts, when it comes to these miracles, I don't know why they've been offered to some and not to others. But we don't need the gift of this type of earthly miracle. These miracles can only point to what we really do need, the final

and complete deliverance spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. And Jesus has offered to this to every single one of us.

Jesus sees our sufferings, he sees our struggles. He is moved with compassion and he is angry about everything which oppresses, imprisons, and limits us. Through the chance to share in his resurrection from the dead we have been given the opportunity to be healed, to be saved, and to be set free.