



Luke 5:12–13

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ 13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ And immediately the leprosy left him.

Reflection

In Luke, the first public words of Jesus' adult ministry are these, read from the prophet Isaiah, and spoken in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth,

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour.'

Then Jesus puts down the scroll and says,

'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

These ancient words are fulfilled in me. But what does Jesus mean by this? Luke, goes on to show us in chapters 4 and 5. And in doing so, he begins to show us the meaning of the words he's chosen to define the ministry of Jesus. What do we see? We see the poor, the blind, those oppressed by demons, those who live as outcasts on the edges of society flocking to Jesus and being healed. But his healing points to something more, something bigger, something for us all. Because Jesus has come not just for these, but for us all. He's come to proclaim good news to the poor in Spirit, he's come to proclaim freedom to prisoners, those enslaved to their own sinful desires, he's come to bring recovery of sight to the spiritually blind and to free those held captive to Satan, sin

and death. Jesus has come to heal our world. His healings and exorcisms point to something far greater. They demonstrate his power and authority to achieve what he's come to do – not just to save individuals from the grips of disease and demon possession, but to heal our whole world, to conquer death once and for all, and to exorcise Satan and his demons forever by casting them into hell.

And so Luke, the doctor, scholar and historian has meticulously recorded for us with his medical eye the sick and those exhibiting symptoms of demon possession coming to Jesus and being healed – as a sign of Jesus' identity, and power, and what is to come on a much greater scale. Today's passage from Luke 5:12–13 continues in similar vein,

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' 13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' And immediately the leprosy left him.

Leaving the crowds behind today we enter into the human story of one particular man. With a little imagination we can picture the events that led to this day. A lifetime ago, or so it seems, he is a respected member of his community, with a wife and children that he cherishes. He attends synagogue, he follows the ways of his fathers,

he gives due honour to his God, a God he loves and serves. All is well until one day he notices, when dressing, an itchy patch of dry, powdery, scabby skin on his arm. He thinks nothing of it at the time. A few days later however, it has spread; with long sleeves he covers it up. But he decides to take some precautions for the sake of those he loves. He begins to refrain from holding his children; a flash of hurt crosses their young faces when he pulls away. Similar distance from the wife of his youth; just in case. For the safety of his family he plucks up the courage and sees a priest. His worst fears are confirmed. And as the disease spread so does the social contagion. Banished, an outcast, never again to hold his children, never again to kiss his wife. Doomed to wander amongst the tombs on the outskirts of town, a dead man

walking. In accordance with Old Testament law he dresses himself in torn clothing, his hair hangs loose, and he wears a bell around his neck to warn people of his passing. He cries out 'Unclean! Unclean!' at the sight of other human beings to warn them away from him. In addition to the physical discomfort of the debilitating and incurable illness that ravages his body; the social, emotional and personal toll is almost beyond description. In short, it is hard to fathom the misery of this man.

Until one day he hears the name of Jesus. In shame and fear, he stumbles into town, his bell ringing, his voice crying out 'Unclean! Unclean!' The townsfolk recoil in horror and disgust; former neighbours and friends avert their eyes, others pick up stones to drive him away. Only one

man holds his ground, and it is at the feet of this man that the leper falls. He presses his face into the dirt at Jesus' feet and he begs,

‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’

He does not doubt for a moment the sovereign power of God. In the Old Testament only God can heal leprosy, and this leper senses something of God in the man before him. Not, ‘If you can, Jesus’, but, ‘If you are willing, I know you can make me clean.’ What extraordinary faith to come out of one of the darkest of places! And don't miss what Jesus does next.

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

Jesus reaches out to touch the untouchable, to love the unlovable. By touching this highly contagious man, it's as if Jesus takes his disease onto himself – just as he takes our sin onto himself. Jesus reaches into the man's isolation and shame and he heals him. Because Jesus is able to cleanse even the worst impurity in those who come to him in repentance and faith.

‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ And immediately the leprosy left him.

What will follow in tomorrow's passage for this leper will be an elaborate and joyful ceremony that will extend over eight full days in accordance with Leviticus 14. Because of what Jesus has done this leper will leave off walking amongst the tombs

and re-enter his community as if a resurrection had taken place. His wife, his children, his extended family and his neighbours will all shed tears of joy, kiss him and embrace him, all the time praising God for this miracle, for having brought him back from death to life.

Think & Pray

Take a moment to journey within this real human story of redemption and reconciliation this morning. In many ways this poignant account is the Gospel in miniature. Jesus came to free captives like this man. In the ancient world a disease like this was strongly suggestive of some secret sin. Clearly this man was steeped in sin from birth to have received such punishment in his flesh, they would have thought. And

yet the truth of it is that spiritually, we're all like this leper. All have sinned and fallen short of God, we're all held captive by our sin. Our condition is terminal, we've been irreconcilably cut-off from God. Until, conscious of our condition, we throw ourselves upon the mercy of Jesus, trusting that he has the power to save us. We cry out with the leper,

‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’

And he is willing and able to save all who come to him in repentance and faith. Pray today that those you know and love would wake up to their true spiritual state, repent of their sin, throw themselves at the feet of Jesus, and that Jesus would reach out and touch them. And pray that our re-

sponse to our salvation would continue to be the response that you imagine from the leper in our passage today – laughing, hugging the ones he loves, telling his story over and over again, and loving and serving Jesus with joy until his dying day, after which he'll again see the face of the one he loves.