

Feb. 14, 2015 Mk. 1: 40-45. Lev. 13:1-2, 44-46

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Fr. Beck says: "Jesus takes the risk of accepting the invitation to a relationship that the leper begs for: *If you wish, you can make me clean. If you wish, in other words. You can meet me as a person, meet me face to face, look into my eyes to see a human spirit dwelling there. You can count yourself as an exception to those who discount me, who look right through me, who avert their eyes when I am around, who quickly move off in the other directions. If you wish, you can count me as a fellow human being, and not as a specimen of danger, a case of pollution. Jesus said, I do will it. Be made clean. And*

he reached out and touched him." The man in the drawing who is outside the box can come in. Now the question is, can we move beyond our safe circle of prayer to reach out and touch? Are we the one in the circle looking out not in?

Mark 1: 40-45 (Mt. 8: 1-4) (Lk. 5: 12-16)

40 A man with **leprosy** came to him and **begged** him on his **knees**, "**If you are willing**, you can **make me clean**." 41 **Filled with compassion**, Jesus **reached out** his hand and **touched** the man. "**I am willing**," he said. "**Be clean!**" 42 **Immediately** the **leprosy** left him and he was **cured**. 43 Jesus **sent him away** at once with a **strong warning**: 44 See that you **don't tell** this to anyone. But go, **show yourself to the priest** and **offer the sacrifices** that **Moses** commanded for your **cleansing**, as a **testimony** to them." 45 Instead he **went out** and began to **talk freely**, **spreading the news**. As a result, Jesus **could no longer enter a town openly** but **stayed outside in lonely places**. Yet the people **still came to him from everywhere**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: The leper didn't doubt that Jesus could help him if he asked. Am I equally confident that God is not only able but eager to help when I ask?

PRAYER: Lord, Mark tells me that you were filled with compassion when you reached out and touched the untouchable leper. So often when I fail, I find it most difficult to forgive myself and therefore think you also have this same limitation. Help me to have the confidence of the leper to reach out to you when I am deathly sick in my failures to love, trusting all the while in your unconditional love. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

LEPROSY: In Jesus' day leprosy was a feared condition. It not only threatened physical life, but religious and social life as well. A diagnosis of leprosy could be equivalent to a death sentence in every way imaginable.

Is there a condition today that carries that same sort of powerful effect?

BEGGED: A leper was not supposed to even let a person get close to them. They were to call out to warn passersby and often carried a bell to signal the danger of coming too near.

What does it tell you about Jesus that he let a leper close enough to even beg from him?

KNEES: The leper is down on his knees, a gesture of abject supplication.

If someone fell on his or her knees begging something from you, how would you feel? What does Mark tell you that Jesus felt?

IF YOU ARE WILLING / I AM WILLING: The question is clear, if you will. The answer is equally clear, I am.

What does this tell you about the leper? About Jesus? About Jesus' source of power?

MAKE ME CLEAN / BE CLEAN / CURED / CLEANSING: The plea is effective and the cure is also. Now the man is able to resume living in community, with his physical and spiritual life restored.

Is there any cleansing that you need today? If so, what is it that you need to become whole/ holy?



FILLED WITH COMPASSION: Whenever we hear that Jesus is filled with compassion it means that he is totally connected with the other person. This opens the floodgates of God's love.

When you are filled with compassion, what feelings do you experience? Do you find yourself responding in "miraculous" ways as well?

REACHED OUT / TOUCHED: In touching the man, Jesus "contaminates" himself. (See below)

Have you ever done something like this? If so, when?

IMMEDIATELY: One of Mark's favorite words is immediately. The speed of response is an affirmation of God's total unconditional love. There needs be no weighing the matter. It is done without hesitation.

How do you think the man felt when this happened? Can you remember a time when your response of care was immediate to the plea as well? Can you identify the source of this instantaneous reaction?

SENT HIM AWAY: Jesus wants the man back among the living as soon as possible. He sends him immediately to do the necessary things to prove that he is cured.

If you had been that person, would you have appreciated this extra consideration?

STRONG WARNING / DON'T TELL: The man is sternly told not to tell.

Why do you think Jesus did that?

SHOW YOURSELF TO THE PRIEST / OFFER THE SACRIFICES / MOSES: (See below) there were strict guidelines on how to tell if someone was truly clean and what was to be done about being readmitted into community and worship. (Read Lev. 13 and 14)

If you had been a family member or friend of this man, what would you want to know? What would you do?

TESTIMONY / TALK FREELY / SPREADING THE NEWS: Now our healed man becomes an evangelist. He can resume his life and speak freely among his community.

Have you ever been "healed" of something that kept you from those you love? What was that like? What happened in order for the healing to take place?

COULD NO LONGER ENTER A TOWN OPENLY / STAYED OUTSIDE IN LONELY PLACES: Now Jesus has traded places with the man. He cannot speak freely and be among the community.

Do you think that Jesus expected this reaction when he warned the man not to talk?

STILL CAME / FROM EVERYWHERE: Even though Jesus cannot be in the community, the community now comes to him. Like John the Baptist, he draws the people to where he is.

Do you see that hand of the Holy (Sneaky) Spirit in this turn of events?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mk. 1: 40-4 // Mt. 8:2f; Lk. 5:12f; Mk. 1: 42 // Mk. 5:30; Lk. 7:14; Lk. 1: 44 //; Lk. 5:14; Lev. 13:49; Lk. 1:45 // Lev. 14: 2-32; Mk. 1:35; Lk. 4:42

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Lev. 13: 1-2, 44-46; Ps. 32:1-2, 5, 11; 1 Cor. 10: 31-11: 1; Mk. 1:40-45; Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Kgs. 5:1-14; Ps. 30; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Mk. 1:40-45;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

LEPROSY: In ancient times, and still yet today in some parts of the world, leprosy is a feared and disfiguring disease that was eventually fatal before modern medicine. People were literally declared “dead” if a diagnosis of leprosy was made. They were exiled to the wastelands and they were to warn passersby if they got too close. People would leave food and provisions out in the wilderness for those exiled. Chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus give an account of how those people or things that were thought to be infected were to be diagnosed and treated. It is thought now that most of what was thought to be leprosy was not indeed true leprosy at all, but some other type of skin disorder, such as psoriasis. A modern day equivalent to the way people responded to lepers could be the early responses to the AIDS virus.

The *Assain* (guilt offering) and *Hattath* (sin offering) were offerings that had to be made when a person had upset God or someone else. They were made when a person had become *ceremonially defiled* (Leviticus 5:2-3), such as through childbirth or leprosy (Leviticus 12; '14:1-32; Mark 1:44; Luke 2:22), when a civil offense had been committed against a neighbor (Leviticus 6:1-7). When a person was overwrought through emotion (Leviticus 19:20-22), or perhaps through error (Leviticus 4:1). The scale of sacrifice was related to rank, and after the blood had been poured out at the altar and the fat burned, the rest of the carcass was taken away and burned. If the offense involved damage to a neighbor then restitution had to be made too (Leviticus 6:4). (See also Leviticus 6:1-15-7:10.) It is important to remember that there was no sacrifice that dealt with deliberate sin and defiance of God's laws.

Gower, Ralph. [The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times](#). Chicago. Moody Press. 1987. Pg. 362

By touching the unclean man, Jesus does not reject the purity laws; rather, as the text clearly implies, he restores the man to a *clean* state, leaving the purity codes intact: four times Mark emphasizes that Jesus makes the man clean of his disease, not that he critiques the law in any way. The cleansing of this leper does not abrogate the purity laws and more than does the cleansing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:10. Indeed, Jesus commands the man to present the *offering* prescribed by law. Pg. 62.

Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2011

When Jesus touched the untouchable leper, he was signaling that there are better way to resolve our social ill (than to ostracize them). He was saying that this approach will not do. In bringing the leper inside society, he was not only easing the pain of the leper. He was not simply saying that this person needs help. He was also saying that society needs to find ways of addressing its anxieties without crating new suffering for certain classes of its member. Pg. 44

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2005.

Illness does not stand alone, but is directly connected to social disorder. On the one hand illness is a disruptive social event. ... On the other hand, illness is only one of many forms of social disorder and is considered primarily as being one of these, and not as a phenomenon in isolation as with modern models of medicine. If, as some say, Mark's narrative is driven by the vision of Jesus' inauguration of a covenant renewal of Israel., we can be sure that the healings are both a primary symbol and a cause of that social renewal Pg. 41-2. Beck Robert. [Banished Messiah](#). Eugene, OR. Wipf & Stock. 2010/

Care is something other than cure. Cure means "change." A doctor, a lawyer, a minister, a social worker—they all want to use their professional skills to bring about changes in people's lives. They get paid for whatever kind of cure they can bring about. But cure, desirable as it may be, can easily become violent, manipulative, and even destructive if it does not grow out of care. Care is being with, crying out with, suffering with, feeling with. Care is compassion. It is claiming the truth that the other person is my brother or sister, human, mortal, vulnerable, like I am. When care is our first concern, cure can be received as a gift. Often we are not able to cure, but we are always able to care. To care is to be human. Henri Nouwen

All healers are wounded healers, as Henri Nouwen said so well. There is no other kind. In fact, you are often most gifted to heal others precisely where you yourself were wounded or wounded others. You learn to salve the wounds of others by knowing and remembering how much it hurts to hurt. Often this memory comes from the realization of your past smallness and immaturity, your selfishness, your false victimhood, and your cruel victimization of others. It is often painful to recall or admit, yet this is also the grace of lamenting and grieving over how we have hurt others. Richard Rohr

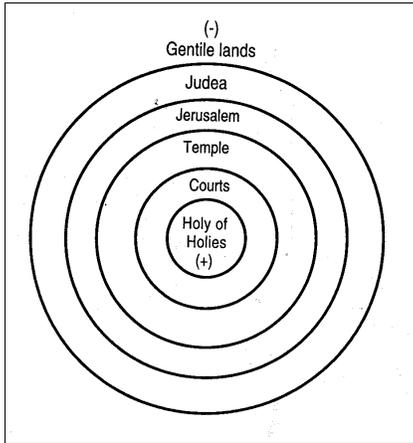
We overcome the evil in the world by the charity and compassion of God, and in so doing we drive all evil out of our own hearts. Merton, Thomas, *No Man Is An Island* (New York: Harcourt, 1955) 215

"The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the physical, material, and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves "inside the skin" of the other. We "go inside" their body, feelings, and mental formations, and witness for ourselves their suffering. Shallow observation as an outsider is not enough to see their suffering. We must become one with the subject of our observation. When we are in contact with another's suffering, a feeling of compassion is born in us. Compassion means, literally, "to suffer with."—Thich Nhat Hanh

"Three quarters of Americans believe the Bible teaches that 'God helps those who help themselves.' That is, three out of four Americans believe that this uber-American idea, a notion at the core of our current individualist politics and culture, which was in fact uttered by Ben Franklin, actually appears in Holy Scripture. The thing is, not only is Franklin's wisdom not biblical; it's counter-biblical. Few ideas could be further from the gospel message, with its radical summons to love of neighbor." - Author Bill McKibben, in his Harper's magazine essay, "The Christian Paradox"

The sign of the prophet Jonah, the only sign Jesus was himself given, was a sign of the compassion of God.
Donald Goergen, O.P.

lep-ro-sy (lepÆrÃ s), n. Pathol.: a chronic, mildly infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*, affecting the peripheral nervous system, skin, and nasal mucosa and variously characterized by ulcerations, tubercular nodules, and loss of sensation that sometimes leads to traumatic amputation of the anesthetized part. Also called Hansen's disease. And behold, a leper, coming to him, said, "Master Jesus, journeying with lepers and eating with them in the inn, I also became a leper. If, therefore, you will, I can be made clean." The Lord then said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and the Lord said to him, "Go and show yourself to the priests..." *Egerton Papyrus 2*.



the religious imagination of the day had fenced the world of Judaism off into ritual zones, ordering all areas of Jewish life. ...the ranking of persons according to holiness has to do with one's standing in relation to the temple. When holiness is defined as purity, the threat of contamination is one of radical blight, insofar as it involves the very root and foundation of ordered existence. In the healings we witness a competition of power over the unclean, with Jesus winning the contest. Social orders, reinforced by ritual, protect us from pollution and contamination by guarding the gates in the walls between zones...the unclean is posed as an opposite to holiness, and not simply to cleanliness.

Beck, Fr. Robert. [Nonviolent Story](#). NY. Maryknoll. 1996. Pgs. 65ff.

Mediterranean cultures are gregarious and group-oriented. They need community to live just as a fish needs water. Without community, social network, connections and relations with others, the other-directed Mediterranean person suffers and can die from seclusion. People who had the problem (leprosy) did not infect the community; they polluted it. For this reason, they had to live outside the camp, apart from God's holy people, alone, until the pollution was gone.

Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle B](#). Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press. 1996. Pages 36f.



This illumination from a 12th-century manuscript, depicts a miracle described in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 8:2-3; Mark 1: 40-42; Luke 5:12-12). The symptoms described in the Hebrew Bible show that *tsara'ath* pronounced (tsah-RAH-aht) applies to a variety of skin conditions possibly including true leprosy. In the medieval church, people sometimes actually preformed a burial mass before sending the victim into exclusion.

Mull, Kenneth V. & Mull, Carolyn Sandquist. [Biblical Leprosy: Is It Really?](#) Bible Review. April 1992. Pages 33 ff

Mark was utterly opposed to interpreting Jesus' success as a *theos aner* (divine man) as the clue that enables one to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah. He does not want the focus of people's attention to be on his powers as a miracle worker, lest it blind people to the essential trait in his life-style: his suffering servanthood.

Weeden, Theodore J. Sr. [Mark: Traditions in Conflict](#). Philadelphia. Fortress Press. 1971. Pg. 155.

Compassion is neither pity nor mercy, but the willingness to offer others, in their suffering, "the gift of our presence." Irma Zaleski (1342)

"The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another." - Thomas Merton

Insofar as it is related to our capacity to ascribe worth to and bestow kindness on ourselves, recognize and honor the sacredness of others, connect with them in their suffering, and take action toward the betterment of their lives, this kind of attuned, nonjudgmental self-relationality is a key component in a spirituality of compassion. Pg. 851.

Hollingsworth, Andrea. *Neuroscience and Spirituality*. Zygon. 12/08.

It is true, political problems are not solved by love and mercy. But the world of politics is not the only world, and unless political decisions rest on a foundation of something better and higher than politics, they can never do any real good. When a country has to be rebuilt after war, the passions and energies of war are no longer enough. There must be a new force, the power of love, the power of understanding and human compassion, the strength of selflessness and cooperation, as the creative dynamism of the will to live and to build, and the will to forgive, the will for reconciliation. Thomas Merton.

God's whole reason for creating the universe was only to make a place in which He could reveal His compassion.
Rabbi Nachman of Braslau (1772-1820)

There is no wilderness so terrible, so beautiful, so arid and so fruitful as the wilderness of compassion. It is the only desert that shall truly flourish like the lily. Pg. 323 Merton, Thomas. [The Sign of Jonah](#). Orlando. FL. Harcourt & Brace. 1953.

If you have people who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have people who deal likewise with their fellow human beings. - Francis of Assisi

We may also experience compassion and love toward a stranger whose troubled glance we have just met. When we become aware of the love and compassion surging within us we see that we are not alone, not disconnected and separate individuals. Despite having separate bodies we are, in a sense, parts of a single soul.

Amit, Ilan. Is Self Development Possible? Parabola. Spring 2007. Pg.101.

All the buried seeds crack open in the dark the instant they surrender to a process they can't see. This moving through the dark into blossom is the threshold to God. Nepo, Mark. [The Book of Awakening](#). Berkeley, CA. Conari Press. 2000. Page 113-4.

The way of the healer is to be profoundly surrendered, profoundly awed, to what we are privileged to witness, without thinking we know the right way for this individual journey that is coming to closure right in front of us. A true healer stands in this profound surrender and supports that person exactly where they are with gratitude, humility, and hopefully with a deep connection to Source, with a willingness to submit to something larger, to be its servant, its slave, really – a slave to love, a slave to the wisdom of this universe. Being with people who are dying gives us a profound opportunity to bow down to mystery and to kiss the ground that mystery walks on. [Janet Quinn](#)

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B. Years 2005 & 2009. pgs. 53-7. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2009. Pgs. 41-44. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2011-12. Pgs. 38-41. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Mitchell, Stephen. [The Enlightened Heart](#). NY. Harper & Row. 1989. Page 68. THE LOVE OF GOD by Dante

Shea, John. [The Hour of the Unexpected](#). Allen, TX. Argus Communications. 1977. Page 102. THE PRAYER TO THE PAIN OF JESUS

Aurelio, John R. [Fables for God's People](#). NY. Crossroad. 1988. Page 65FF. THE MAYBE MIRACLE.

Bausch, William J. [Storytelling](#). Mystic, CT. Twenty-Third Pub. 1984. Page 129F.

Gill, Jean. [Images of Myself](#). NY. Paulist Press. 1982. Page 61F.