

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

“Today’s Gospel is about Jesus, not the leper or leprosy.”¹

And I suppose that goes for more than today’s Gospel reading—
that’s how it is for the whole Bible.

The Old Testament story of Naaman isn’t about Naaman exactly,
but how our Lord comes to him graciously, undeservedly,
and lavishes all sorts of gifts on him—
of course including a cure for his leprosy.

The Scriptures are about Jesus—
but we can’t help making them all about us.

That’s why some of the things we’ve been hearing the last few weeks are so difficult for us.
Mark gives us strange words of Jesus—
words we can’t seem to make much sense of.

Last week Mark said,

“And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.
And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (1:34).

The week before, when the demon stands up and declares Jesus to be the Holy One of God, Jesus said,

“Be silent, and come out of him!”

This week, after the leper is made clean by Christ, Mark says,

“And Jesus *sternly* charged him and *sent him away at once*, and said to him,
‘See that you say *nothing to anyone*’ (Mk 1:43-44).

But doesn’t Jesus want people to know?

Doesn’t He want to be known as the Savior, the healer, the curer, the powerful one?

That’s what we’d want if we were him, right?

But as the powerful one, who should He associate Himself?

Don’t presidents hang out with other world leaders?

Sports stars are rarely caught hanging out with the common folk.

And how often do you hear of Boeing execs shootin’ the breeze in the warehouse?

Power and might don’t normally mingle with the weak and lowly.

There’s a clear divide and everyone knows it.

¹ Norman E. Nagel, “Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany: Mark 1:40-45 – Valparaiso University (1979),”
Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel, 59.

That's why today's leper so easily confesses that Jesus is able (has power) to heal him.
That's not the question—of course He does.

But does He *want* to? Is He *willing*?

There are two miracles in today's text—one greater, the other lesser.

The lesser miracle is that the leper is made clean, that his flesh is restored.
Now, of course Jesus *can* do it,
He's been healing all sorts of folks in the other town over.

The much greater miracle is that this powerful God *wishes, wants, wills* to be with the lowly, the rejected, and the dying.

That the Powerful One even associates Himself with the leper is to go against all of society,
all of what the best doctors say, even against Moses and the Law itself!
There's nobody less worth caring for than a leper!

So, is Jesus *willing*?
Does He care about the leper?
And most relevant for us, does He care about me?

What we see in today's Gospel gives us great comfort!
For this Jesus joins Himself to the leper.
He takes hold of that rotting man.
He Himself becomes unclean with the uncleanness of the leper.
He joins in his uncleanness and shares it with him.
And takes it to Himself.

Is Jesus willing?
Certainly!
Does He care for this poor leper?
Like nobody else can or will!

Jesus sets aside the law, the advice of the doctors, the social taboos, and reaches out His hand to touch this leprous, unclean man.
“**I will; be clean!**” (Mk 1:41)

Now pay attention to how this healing happens:
Jesus doesn't offer 7 steps toward effective cleansing of leprosy.
He doesn't coach him along towards cleanliness.
And He certainly doesn't give any sense that the leper has a role in the cleansing at all!

The cure for leprosy is in the Word of Jesus alone.
And this cure works both for the leprosy of the flesh as well as the leprosy of our heart.

And this is the greater miracle today:

That the Lord of the world, the creator, the almighty,
should care about someone so lowly, so utterly worthless and unclean as a leper!

And so it goes for us, too.

Does the Lord care about me?

Certainly!

Jesus says, “Yes—**I will; be clean!**”

We’re all unclean with all sorts of stuff—

not so much leprosy, though it could be that too.

For us, it’s mainly things like greed and pride, arrogance, hatred, and selfishness.

We’re horribly filthy with our sin, it covers us head to toe and it eats away at our flesh.

And when we finally realize it, we wonder if there’s any way we could be clean, too?

Does God care about me?

Does He notice my pain and suffering, or do I first need to get my act together for Him to notice?

Of course He can heal and cure and clean us, but will He?

Certainly!

Just as Jesus took on the leper’s leprosy, so also He took on your sin.

He took your greed and pride, your lust, arrogance, hatred, and selfishness.

He took all your filthy sin and made Himself the greatest sinner—

the sinner no one could out sin—

and He let all that sin be punished in His body on the cross.

So does He care about you?

Certainly!

How do you know?

Look to the cross. See His crucified body hanging, bleeding *for you!*

Look to the places He gives Himself to you, where Jesus is *for you.*

Look to the font, remember your Baptism, and know that there He called you His own—
there He spoke the Word and you were clean, and your leprosy was taken away.

And this Word of life, of cleaning, He speaks to us over and over again.

Every time we encounter this Jesus, we encounter the One who is both able and willing to heal.

And with Jesus, when He speaks, things happen.

So again today He says to you in your leprosy of sin,

“I will; be clean.”

You are forgiven.

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