

Title

c-b-6th Sunday of Ordinary Time Feb. 11 2018

The leprosy that we read about in the bible is not the same as the leprosy we read about in the news. Today when we hear about leprosy, we are talking about an infectious skin disease which leads to nerve and skin damage and eventually to terrible disfigurement and disability, it is also known as Hansen's disease can be cured.

The leprosy that we read about in the bible was probably some sort of skin rash or fungus that turned the skin white. It was highly contagious, and to protect the general population from the disease, those who had a spot of white skin were quarantined. Now by quarantine I mean they were made to live outside the community, and whenever someone came too close they had to cry out unclean, unclean. So not only was it a physical disease it was also a social disease. Someone afflicted with leprosy was cut off from their family, their friends and could not join in any community celebrations. Needless to say it was also a psychological disease, as it is difficult to cope outside the community. A leper who was left alone to face his deteriorating future must have experienced excruciating isolation.

Mother Theresa once said, "The biggest disease today is not leprosy, but rather the feeling of being unwanted." This is true about modern day leprosy and leprosy in Biblical times. Having the disease made you feel unwanted, unloved, and prevented any form of contact between you and the people around you.

Before I go any further I need to make a distinction between healing and curing. Curing is merely getting rid of the bug that is causing the disease. Usually a good dose of Penicillin will cure you of most diseases. But healing necessitates making healthy the mind, body, and soul. Think about this, and think about the quote of Mother Theresa. "The biggest disease today is not leprosy, but rather the feeling of being unwanted." Imagine you were someone who for years had leprosy; you were cut off from family, friends, celebrations. Undoubtedly, you would be scarred. Your relationship with those you have been closest with has been damaged. You cannot go from a family member and a friend to an outcast, without some sort of effect on your soul.

It is interesting to note that Jesus is not interested in curing someone. But he is interested in healing someone. He tells the leper in the gospel, go show yourself to the priest. In other words, get your certificate of being cured...so that you can rejoin your family, friends—indeed the entire community. The long imposed quarantine has been lifted and you can become one with the community once again. It is no wonder he did his happy dance. He has not only been cured, he had been healed. He had much to be thankful for.

It is also noteworthy that Jesus reached out and touched the leper. Now remember lepers were quarantined. They were forbidden to come close to anyone. Jesus could have simply said, "Be made clean," curing him. But he understood that the leper needed to be healed, to know that he was reintegrated into the community. This would only happen if Jesus reached out and actually touched him. And I might add, it was probably the first time that someone touched him since the advent of his leprosy, and he was cast out of the community.

It should also be noted that in touching the leper, Jesus would normally have rendered himself unclean. If this gospel tells us anything about Jesus, it is that he regards human need as more important than ritual regulation.

The whole story of the leper forces us to ask the question. Who are the lepers today? Who are those we cast to the fringe of society, who are those that no one visits, touches or speaks to. I believe the aged who are in our long term care facilities are the modern day lepers. They have few if any visitors. People only go into see them to: Get them out of bed, administer medication, or put them back into bed. I am sure they feel cut off from their families and from society. I believe the homeless are also modern day lepers. We make a point ignoring their presence, rendering them not only untouchable, but also invisible. In the kingdom of God there is no such thing as an outsider, All belong to Christ.

The question we need to ask ourselves is “What are we going to do to heal the lepers in our society. Note I did not say cure the lepers. We cannot make those in the long term care facilities young and healthy. But we can make both of these groups feel like they belong. We can visit with them. We can lend invite them into our circle, touch them, love them and make them feel like a human being again. And that is perhaps what all of us want. Just to feel like human being again.

In the second reading, Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, encourages all Christians to be imitators of Christ. Nowhere in the gospel does Christ push someone aside. At no time does he say, “No I will not help you.” Never does he say, “Shut up I do not want to acknowledge your existence. On the contrary he reaching out and touches them. Jesus regards human need as more important than ritual regulation. As disciples--as imitators of Christ--we are called to do the same. We cannot push people to the fringe of society, we cannot say, “I can’t help you. We need to make people feel like they belong, and we cannot be so ritualistic that we neglect the basic human needs of those around us.

Today we are celebrating the sacrament of the sick. It is our opportunity to say to the sick, feeble and aged. We have not cast you out. You are an important part of this community. We cannot be whole without your presence. And so at this time I would invite anyone who would like to receive the sacrament of the sick to please come forward. Maybe not to be cured...but definitely to be healed.

(Go front and center and invite people to come forward)

