

Lenten Service
Lenten Theme: “Fall on Your Knees”

Text: Mark 1:40-45 (NIV)

⁴⁰A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” ⁴¹Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. ⁴³Jesus 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.” ⁴⁵Instead 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.

Those in Need Kneel

Infections today are serious business. It seems that staph infections are becoming more and more common. The first time that I ever heard the term was several years ago when our synodical president Al Barry contracted a staph infection in the hospital and died. Last spring my dad had a big boil on the back of his head. I took him to the clinic, and they lanced it. A few days later the clinic called and informed us that he had a staph infection. He has to undergo months of painful treatments and heavy duty antibiotics in order to get rid of the infection. In the last few years, I have been amazed at how many of our members have contracted a staph infection after surgery or on an open wound.

When my dad had his infection, he was quarantined to his apartment. For over a month the only place that he could go was to the doctor. Even after he was cured, it took a while for his neighbors to get comfortable around him. (To be honest, I even put plastic over my car seat when I took him to the doctor at that time.)

One of the most difficult things for me as a pastor is when I visit members in the hospital who have an infection. There is a cart in the hallway in front of the room. If you want to visit, you have to put on a gown, rubber gloves, and sometimes a mask. Sometimes the nurse will tell me that if I don’t touch the person or get too close, I don’t have to gown up. I can’t help but think of how demeaning it must be that everyone who visits you must have some kind of shield between you and them. Even years after the infection has cleared up, visitors still must gown up if that infection is not removed from the medical record. I used to think that we had no correlation to the “Unclean, Unclean,” that the lepers in biblical times cried out, but I have come to see that cart outside the room as our modern day version of “Unclean.”

Today we see how those who are unclean and in need also kneel before Jesus. The world might see them as someone to stay away from, but Jesus touches them with His grace and mercy.

I. This man spent his life shouting, “Unclean.”

We heard the regulation with regard to infectious diseases in tonight’s Old Testament reading. (Lev 13:45-46) The person had to wear torn clothing, was not allowed to comb his hair, had to cover the

lower part of his face, and had to live outside town. The worst part of this however was that every time someone came near the person, he had to shout, "Unclean!" It was a way to keep the infection from spreading. It had to be done for the good of the community, but imagine what life was like for these people. Their clothing made them look ragged. They had to live apart from their family and friends. They had to warn other people when they got too close.

Ever since the day that he contracted leprosy this man kept his distance from other people. He shouted, "Unclean," until the day that Jesus passed by. He didn't keep his distance from Jesus. He ran to the Lord and fell on his knees. Then he said, "*Lord if you are willing, You can make me clean.*"

Today there are many people who see themselves as "Unclean." Sometimes their suffering makes them feel unclean. We often give the impression that real Christians don't have any troubles. People who are experiencing a lot of problems often feel out of place. There are times when I have noticed that it is a misperception, but sometimes we can give that perception. I think of Job's friend Eliphaz who told him "*Those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.*" (Job 3:8) At other times the sins, that people have done, cause them to feel like outsiders. They know what kind of life they have led, and they are ashamed of it. They believe that if they come to church people will look down on them for what they have done.

In either case there are times when people feel unclean, but like this man we want to come to Jesus because only He can make us clean. In our times of trouble, we kneel before Him in prayer, "Lord! Help me!" In our guilt, we confess, "Lord, forgive me!" Worship and the fellowship of our Lord's Church are not places that people should stay away from in times of guilt and need. It is where we need to go, because that is where we find Jesus, and only He can make us clean.

II. In His mercy, Jesus cleansed this man with leprosy.

Every action of Jesus in verse 41, shows us something about our Savior. It says that he was filled with compassion. The Greek word for compassion means, "guts." It means that Jesus' heart went out to the man. He saw this man's plight and it touched Him. Our Lord has that same compassion for each one of us in our times of trouble. Peter wrote in His first letter, "*Cast your cares on Him, for He care for you.*" The Lord cares for each one of us personally. His heart goes out to us.

There were probably many people who had been moved by this man's plight, but Jesus did something more. He touched the man. It had been a long time since anyone had been willing to touch him, but Jesus did it. By touching the unclean man, Jesus also made Himself unclean according to the Old Testament Laws. (Lev 5:2) This is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4, "*Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him and afflicted.*" Jesus took this man's infirmity on Himself, and He took all of our infirmities, troubles, and sins on Himself. Then note what Isaiah writes, "*Yet, we considered Him stricken by God.*" Sometimes people think that those who suffer must be getting what they deserved. That is exactly what the people thought about Jesus. As Jesus was suffering on the cross, the chief priests mocked Him saying, "*He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'*" Jesus not only had compassion on the man. He touched him and took his disease on Himself. He not only had compassion on us. He took our suffering, sin, and death on Himself on the

cross.

Then Jesus told the man, "I am willing. Be clean." On his knees the man begged Jesus, "*If you are willing, you can make me clean.*" Jesus answered, "*I am willing. Be clean.*" Never again would he have to shout, "Unclean" because Jesus had cleansed him of his leprosy. In fact, he would leave and tell everyone of what Jesus had done for him. It is interesting that it was now Jesus who had to stay outside of town because so many people were coming to Him to be cleansed. Again there is a correlation to this from Isaiah 53 where the prophet writes, "*By His wounds we are healed.*" (Is 53:5) Jesus took our sins on Himself on that cross, so that He could heal us from them. He paid for all of our sins in full. We pray, "Lord, cleanse me from all my sin," and He says, "You are forgiven." In Romans 8 Paul writes with regard to our other troubles and cares, "*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all— how will He not also along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen... Who shall separate us from the love us Christ?*" The answer is nothing. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been cleansed. We have been healed and forgiven. God is with us in every time of suffering. His heart goes out to us. He works all things for the good of those who love Him.

The world might sometimes look at us as unclean. We might even feel that we are unclean. But Jesus has taken our infirmities, sorrows, and sins on Himself. He has cleansed us in the water of Holy Baptism. He promises to never leave us or forsake us. So don't run from Him in times of trouble or guilt, but run to Him just like this man did to receive the help and peace He is willing to give to you too.

Amen

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