

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Quinquagesima Sunday, March 2, 2025
(50 days before Easter)

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 276, 143:6, 141, 152, 277
Lessons: 2 Kings 5:1-17, Acts 10:34-43, Luke 5:12-16.
Sermon Text: Mark 1:40-45.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“How’s your leprosy today?”
“What? Pastor, what are you talking about?”
You are thinking “I don’t have leprosy.”
Well, let’s take a look at leprosy.
In a parallel text to our Gospel lesson we see that

JESUS HEALS A LEPER

- 1. A person with leprosy was “unclean”.**
- 2. Jesus heals from leprosy.**
- 3. Leprosy is a picture of sin, and**
- 4. Jesus also heals from sin.**

Leprosy even today is a terrible disease. But in the Old Testament leprosy was an especially horrible and dreaded disease. The Levitical laws of God required those who had this disease to live apart from other people. They were to remain apart from the rest of society and if anyone approached them, they were to shout out loud “Unclean”, “Unclean”, to let others know that they were infected with leprosy. The most severe cases of leprosy, which in our lifetime has been called “Hansen’s disease”, eventually caused the joints of the fingers and the toes to fall off, one by one. Before that would happen, scabs would form, hair would fall out, fingernails and toenails would loosen, decay, and drop off. Joint after joint would shrink and fall off, the gums and teeth would disappear; the nose, eyes, and even the tongue would slowly decay. It was truly a horrible disease.

The term “leprosy” in Scripture covers a wide variety of skin diseases and is not limited to what today is called “Hansen’s disease”. The King James Version uses the word leprosy while the New International Version uses other words such as “infectious skin disease”. Whatever form it took it was considered contagious, hideous, painful, and often incurable. Those afflicted also became social outcasts. Should they ever experience healing, they were required to show themselves to the priests to determine whether they were actually healed or not. Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 speak in great detail of leprosy.

In two of our lessons today we heard of the healing of someone who had leprosy. In our Old Testament lesson, we saw one who was not of the nation of Israel being healed of his leprosy as a result of the Word of the God of Israel. In our Gospel lesson and in our sermon text we saw one healed who was of the people of Israel. The lepers of Israel had some clearly defined instructions. If they were ever healed of their leprosy, they were to go show themselves to the priests to assure that they were cleansed.

Jesus surely performed a miracle in healing this man of his leprosy. We perhaps are surprised that Jesus first told the man not to tell anyone and then ordered him to carry out the requirements of the Levitical law: “**Show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing.**” But Jesus himself gave the reason: “**as a testimony to**” the priests. As Jesus approached the end of his life on earth, the priests were

among his bitterest enemies, rejecting him and his saving mission. However if they had examined this man and pronounced him cured, they would have been unable to deny the divine power of our Lord and unable to deny that one greater than Moses was at work among them.

But the man who was healed didn't show himself to the priests. ***“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.”***

Another reason why Christ did not want the leper to tell others about the miracle becomes clear from what happened when the man disobeyed Jesus. If we had been that man and had been healed in this way, we too could not have kept this mighty deed of Christ to ourselves. But the result was that Jesus now had to avoid the towns, because the moment he would enter a town crowds would gather, not to hear his words, but to be cured of their afflictions. Thus what the man did interfered with Jesus' ministry of the Word, his ministry of preaching the Gospel. Even though Jesus avoided towns, people still came to him from everywhere. He was at the height of his popularity. However, opposition was about to face him every time he opened his mouth, especially from the priests who should have certified that this leper had been healed.

Having leprosy would affect a person's entire life. He would know he was ceremonially “unclean” and was to be separated from everyone and everything which society considered to be “good” or beneficial or pleasant.

Leprosy gives us a dramatic, striking picture of sin. Sin is something which affects a person's entire life and permeates the entire personality of a human being with its contaminating and disintegrating force. Sin separates us from God, and is incurable by men, and terminates in death – eternal death.

Just as leprosy led to death, the Apostle Paul tells us ***“in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me.”*** (Romans 7:13, NIV84)

Look at the many discussions of sin in Scripture and compare sin to leprosy. One example is from Psalm 38. ***“Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.”*** (Psalm 38:3–8, NIV84) Doesn't that sound like the problem of leprosy? Isaiah tells us at the beginning of his book ***“From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.”*** (Isaiah 1:6, NIV84) And at the end of his book Isaiah shows us how sin separates us from God, just as those with leprosy had to be separated from other people. ***“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*** (Isaiah 59:2, NIV84)

The man who approached Jesus did not cry out, “Unclean,” and we can understand why. In his great distress he did not want anyone to stop him from coming to the one he had recognized as being able to do what no one else could do, namely, heal him. Falling on his knees before Jesus – and in this way expressing his faith that Jesus had divine power and authority to heal and also expressing his own dire need – he cried out, ***“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”*** (Mark 1:40, NIV84) Jesus of course was willing to heal this man's leprosy, just as he is willing to heal everyone from their sins.

This man acknowledged Christ's power to heal but did not demand this gift from him. Instead, he cast himself entirely on Christ's mercy. This is how we too are to approach our Lord with our earthly troubles; we are to approach our Lord with our problems and leave the solutions up to him.

In the same way we humbly approach our Lord asking for forgiveness for all our sins.

Jesus was not afraid to touch the leper. Compassion filled Jesus' heart. He did not withhold his blessing. He even ignored that the man had violated the Levitical law by not crying out, “Unclean!” In so doing Jesus indicated that when it comes to the requirements of the ceremonial law, love and compassion take precedence over ritual and regulation. After all, Jesus is the fulfillment of the ceremonial law.

Jesus even reached out and touched the man, which was an act of compassion — although that technically made Jesus himself ceremonially unclean. With one word in the Greek language he cured the leper: ***“Be clean!”*** Jesus did not have to ask God's permission. He himself, as true God, possessed divine authority.

Jesus also reaches out to us and heals us from our sins. For example, Peter tells us “*All the prophets testify about him [- Jesus] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*” (Acts 10:43, NIV84) Peter also tells us “*that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.*” (Acts 13:38–39, NIV84) Paul assures us that “*In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace*” (Ephesians 1:7, NIV84)

So what about our leprosy? Well, you and I don’t have physical leprosy. But you and I do have the leprosy of sin.

And how are we healed from that? It is the grace of God. We must rely on the love of God. We must rely on the wisdom of God. God in his wisdom and love sent to mankind healing for the leprosy of sin.

We must pay attention the words of John the Baptist who tells us: “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29, NIV84)

With the hymn writer we rejoice:

1. Today Thy mercy calls us
To wash away our sin.
However great our trespass,
Whatever we have been,
However long from mercy
Our hearts have turned away,
Thy precious blood can cleanse us
And make us white today.

2. Today Thy gate is open,
And all who enter in
Shall find a Father's welcome
And pardon for their sin.
The past shall be forgotten,
A present joy be given,
A future grace be promised,
A glorious crown in heaven. (The Lutheran Hymnal 279)

Yes, today Jesus offers healing for your leprosy of sin. Accept that healing in faith and live today, tomorrow and the next day as God’s beloved children, healed with the forgiveness of your sins. Amen.