

Sermon Mark 1 40 45 6th S a Epiphany

Sermon: 6th Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Mark 1:40-45 (v41): A man with leprosy.

Theme: God's will.

Goal: To submit ourselves to God's will. His ultimate will is our salvation.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *This is the first report we have of Christ cleansing a leper. Only one other record is given of the actual healing of lepers, namely, the 10 lepers on the way to Jerusalem*, (Series B, p. 66) where one was a Samaritan – the only one who came back to say “Thank You”! (Luke 17:12)

We have only two records of healing of leprosy in the Old Testament as well: Miriam, the sister of Moses (Num 12:15), and Naaman, as we heard in the Old Testament reading today (2 Kings 5:1-15). Jesus mentioned Naaman healing when He said in Luke 4:27: “There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, - only Naaman the Syrian.”

These few records help us to understand a little bit about God's will and how He handles us and our desires.

I – The leper: his faith and how he submitted himself to God's will

Leprosy was dreaded disease. The lepers were considered unclean and had to live apart from their families and from the society. The Law had made that leper an outcast. When someone was to approach him, he had to cry from afar: “Unclean! Unclean!” (Series B 67)

This man with the dreaded disease had heard about Jesus and His power. Maybe Jesus had cured other lepers that were not recorded in the Gospels. When John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the Messiah, Jesus answered pointing to His miracles; and one of them was: “those who have leprosy are cured” (Luke 7:22). The leper of our text believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the One sent by God. But he didn't force Jesus to heal him, as many do it nowadays in their prayers and services. *He came to Jesus in humble faith, not questioning Christ's power and love.* (Series B 67). He

“begged Him on his knees, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean'.” He had faith that Jesus could cleanse him, but he submitted himself to Jesus’ will.

II – Jesus: His compassion according to God's will

And Jesus was willing! More than that: Jesus was “filled with compassion”. Jesus was touched in His heart when He saw the humble man coming to Him with such a faith and big need. The compassion of Jesus is always behind all His deeds when He is helping people. He cannot look without compassion to us. Compassion is part of His love!

“Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man.” The unclean man, who was untouchable even by his wife and children, was now touched by the gracious hand of Jesus. Jesus was not afraid to touch him. Jesus is not scared to come and touch any disease, even the HIV/AIDS infected; to touch the needy with His hand of compassion and love is part of His ministry. This doesn't mean to heal all of them of their diseases, but to give them love and hope, and, above all, to give them forgiveness and life!

In this case, Jesus was willing to cleanse. “He reached out His hand and touched the man. I am willing, He said. Be clean! Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.”

Jesus didn't want to perform a miracle only. He said to the man: “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them.” Jesus wanted to glorify the Father and to testify before the established church that God was among His people, according to the promises of the Old Testament.

III – We: God's will in our lives

God's will is not always our will. As He knows our lives and our future, He thinks different many times. It's like a mother that doesn't give a knife to the little one; but when the child grows up, he will know how to use a knife safely and will get one.

We always pray as Jesus taught us: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in

heaven.” We believe that God's will is done perfectly in heaven and that His wisdom is much bigger than ours to do His will among us as well. But, at the same time, we question God many times about His will. Let us come in prayer like the leper of our Gospel: “He begged Him on his knees, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean’”.

And when we look behind us, how God has guided our lives till now, we have to acknowledge that we couldn't have done it better by ourselves. Let us trust in His decisions and good will.

The ultimate will of God is our salvation. “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” as Paul confesses in Romans 8:28. Luther explains the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer about God's will in this way: *“God's will is done when he breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.”*

Conclusion: I found a nice article in the African Bible Commentary (p. 447) that helps us to understand a little better the issue of sickness, healing and God's will. Let me share it with you:

“In traditional African cosmology, God is the ultimate source of sickness and health, as expressed in the proverb 'If God gives an ailment, He also provides the cure' (Ghana). Divinities and ancestors are mediators of health. While diseases are regarded as having both natural and supernatural sources, ultimate causality is assigned to the supernatural. God can send disease, but more commonly diseases are understood to be caused by evil forces (such as witchcraft and sorcery) or to be a result of one's own evil deeds.

This traditional view means that treatments based solely on scientifically observed cause-and-effect relationships are not perceived as meeting the health needs of the sick. A permanent cure requires a redemptive ritual to deal with the spiritual factors that made someone vulnerable to the disease. Hence the office of the traditional priest has always been associated with divination, diagnosis, healing and exorcism.

*According to the **Bible**, all sickness is ultimately a result of the fall. Diseases may be a punishment for violations of God's laws (Exod 15:26; Deut 28:2),*

while continued obedience to God may ensure good health (Exod 15:26; Deut 28:1-14). The book of Job, however, makes it clear that diseases does not always represent divine punishment. Healing is the manifestation of God's goodness and compassion in response to human suffering (Exod 15.26)...

Jesus threw light on the understanding of sickness as punishment (John 9 - The healing of the man born blind) and also recognized that some sickness are demonic in his origin (Mark 9:17-27). He cured the blind (Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52), lepers (Luke 17:11-19), the disabled and paralyzed (Matt 9:2-7; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18-25). His healing activities manifested God's compassion towards the sick and the oppressed (Matt 9:35-36; 14:14; 15:29-34; Mark 1:40-42; Luke 4:18-27). They also established His status as the Christ (Matt 9:1-8; Mark 10:46-52) and had an evangelistic purpose (John 20:30-31). Jesus expected His disciples to continue the ministry of healing (Mark 16:9-20; John 20:21; see also Acts 3:6-10, 12-16; 14:8-10).

In dealing with the subject of healing, we must avoid two extremes: first, the claim that godly Christians do not fall sick (contradicted by Phil 2:25-30), and second the denial that there can be faith healing (Acts 28:3-6; 1 Cor 12:9).

The traditional understanding of the cause of diseases has survived in African Christianity, as is clear from the popularity of prophets and faith healers. The clergy are expected, whether justifiably or not, to authenticate their ministry by exercising powers traditionally credited to religious persons, such as healing, unveiling hidden things, predicting the future, and being able to bless and cure effectively. When such powers are not present, members drift to other churches, attend other healing services, and consult spiritualists and fetish priests.

African Christians must realize that God reserves the sole prerogative to heal. Not all the sick in the days of Jesus were healed, nor were all the dead raised to life like Lazarus. Whether Jesus chooses to heal or not does not change the fact that He is the Saviour and Lord. Consequently, we must seek Him for who He is and not merely for healing.” (Kingsley Larbi).

(You can find the entire sermon and that article at St. Thomas website, where you can search for several Bible texts about that issue).

May God give us the true faith in Jesus that conforms all our life according to His gracious will. Amen.

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