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Luke 5: 12 - 26

Will I be healed today?

With our Lead Pastor, Ben

Luke does not give us a commentary or an opinion nor does he refer us back to the Old Testament. He gives us the plain facts. He was not there so he spent time with those who were. That gave him first-hand personal testimonies. He cannot give a full account of Jesus' life without

talking about the miracles. The supernatural is at work from the very beginning of the gospel, at the birth of Christ. God is at work; the laws of nature as they apply to us do not apply to God. He rules the universe and can do what he pleases as and when he wants, according to his own character and person. Here is God and man fused into one person.

A man arrives with the scourge of the ancient world, leprosy. It is a long, protracted, humiliating, debilitating condition. As with highly contagious diseases it is isolating; zero physical contact. You can't hug your children or visit elderly relatives. You are completely removed from society. This man is in palliative care and agony of soul because of his isolation. He is thrown onto the compassion of others for his and his family's survival. Isn't it a blessing to be here today to give and take comfort from each other!

Jesus is already famous and the whispers are going around asking, 'Could this be the promised Messiah? Maybe this is the one of whom the Bible speaks (see Lk. 4:18-21) Maybe he can do something.' The man with leprosy comes to Jesus and the crowd begins to guard its personal space. If the Messiah gets leprosy it'll put him out of the running. As a doctor Luke would have felt helpless in the face of this disease. Some theologians think that it may be that Lazarus, Mary and Martha were the children of Simon the Leper. Jesus tells the story of Lazarus the leper who sat at the gate of the rich man hoping for some little token of care. The rich man did absolutely nothing. The dogs in the street were kinder to him as they licked his wounds clean.

The man asks Jesus for one thing, He just wanted to be clean so he could be with people. Isolation is a very destructive condition. Jesus does the one thing this man needs. He crosses the line and just touches him. God is everywhere but when you are isolated and sick it's easy to think you are not at the top of God's favourite list. But the moment Jesus touches this man a human being touches him. And God also touches him. Jesus goes to where he is however terrible his situation and takes him to where Jesus is so that he can be where Jesus is. The man becomes clean. The leprosy leaves him by the power of God in this moment. The miracles are parables pointing to Jesus and bringing people to where he is. This man is brought back into cleanliness, life and community, opportunity and relationship with God. That's what Jesus does. He goes out and gets sinners and brings them to his Father. That is the pattern of his own life; Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem and the cross, the nails and the crown. He moves towards the cursing and the rejection, the hostility and the contradiction, the misunderstanding and the selfishness. He is going to take the whole of man's sinfulness on his shoulders. He will bear it all and then RISE in GLORY!

These miracles are not just accidental acts of compassion. They are the gospel story lived out in people's lives. All these crowds come to Jesus wanting a miracle. Who can blame them for wanting to be well? Being sick is awfully horrible. It's so much cheaper and quicker to just go to Jesus. We all understand that but in verse 16 Jesus withdraws from the crowd. When he was in Nazareth he declared himself to be the Messiah. That is bigger news. God and man in one person is the greatest miracle there is. The people of Nazareth wanted miracles but Jesus is saying that God wants to give you Jesus as his gift to you. It is greater than your health. It is the most important thing there is because we have a bigger problem than just our health. However, Jesus comes back in verse 17 to teach people about the kingdom, his ministry and identity so that people will know who he is and believe in him.

The power of the Lord to heal was present while he was teaching but he was doing the more important thing. He was teaching. The message is most important. There were some men who were determined to get their miracle even if they had to dig a hole in the roof. Whatever the harm and destruction, whatever the interruption to his vital teaching of the things people need to hear, Jesus forgives them. But the Pharisees are listening. They are right. Only God can forgive sins. In retrospect, in spite of the fact that Jesus heals a paralysed man they have not even considered that they may have God in their midst. They understand that the forgiveness of sins is God's sovereign domain. Jesus explains why he was healing this man, "I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Leprosy, paralysis, covid, all these things are awful, painful, inconvenient, difficult, financially and morally consequential but sin is a condition that each one of us carries along with us unwittingly, from generation to generation. We all just bumble along. Drug addicts hang around with other drug addicts because they get it. It seems so normal so we associate with other sinners. They are the only people who can tolerate us because we are all like that. We are in this community of sin.

What happens to us because of sin is far worse than what happens to somebody who contracts leprosy. It lasts a whole lot longer, it is far more painful and it is completely incurable and it is absolutely separating from God. It is an eternal death. Have you tried to cure yourself by living a good life: always doing the right thing and never doing the wrong thing? The only cure is God's forgiveness. We can be made clean. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins. You can be clean. What happens in the end is so amazing, undeserved, and wonderful because "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him" (1Cor 2:9)

At the end of this passage, they are all praising God. The man got healed. We live in a community of grace where we know we are not perfect but we love each other and forgive each other when we make mistakes and are stupid and it's ok because our sins are forgiven, because Jesus has touched us. And that's why we praise God.