

6 Epiphany Year B
February 12, 2012
St. Luke Sheboygan Falls
Mark 1:40-45

Unhappy Exchange

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. AMEN.

Today's Gospel reading is deceptively simple. A leper approaches Jesus and begs him for healing. Jesus heals him. Ask and you shall receive. End of story.

The thing is, while Jesus seems to heal everybody who comes to him with a request. The leper said, "***If you choose you can make me clean.***" Jesus stretches out his hand and touches him and says, "***I do choose. Be made clean.***" The cure is immediate.

One can't deny that this is wonderful for the guy who gets healed, but what about all of the people then and now

who are affected by various diseases and afflictions who are not. Does that mean that Jesus is unwilling to heal certain people?

It isn't so much that Jesus wants to cure some people and not others. It is more a matter of Jesus' priorities for his ministry being different than those of those around him.

Yes, in Scripture and sometimes even in life experience today healing happens. It is a mystery why it happens for some and not for others. In the Bible, it most frequently occurs when people seek out Jesus. He rarely if ever sets out to heal as his primary mission. For Jesus, the kingdom of God is about preaching and teaching the good news of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Most of the time, other people come to Jesus for healing or cleansing while he is in the middle of doing something else. The more people see Jesus

perform signs and miracles, the less he is free to move around in public to preach and teach.

If you look at verse 41 in different Bible translations you might be surprised at what you find. The word that our insert renders as “moved with pity” is found in the New King James version as “moved with compassion” and in the New International version as “he was indignant.” These differences may be accounted for by textual variants in the original Greek—some manuscripts use “*splagchtheis*” which depicts pity while others use the word “*orgistheis*” which is a word for anger.

What might it have meant that Jesus was angry when he agreed to heal this man? On the one hand, he could have been angry at the man’s condition, much as you might be if a family member had a dreaded disease. On the other hand, he could have

been frustrated, indeed “indignant” to be so infringed upon when he knew that the more he became known for his powers to heal, the less he would be able to move around freely to do what he wanted to do—spread the gospel.

Later on, Jesus even sternly warns this man to keep the news of his healing to himself, an admonition which he promptly ignores. The former leper can’t keep his mouth shut and blabs the story EVERYWHERE he goes. Ironically, he is free to roam everywhere while Jesus is now stuck out in the country. This is an unhappy exchange indeed for Jesus!

Think about it. Whenever he heals someone or performs a miracle, there is a cost to Jesus. He can no longer lead his life as an ordinary guy. He is “outed” as something more, the Messiah, the Son of God, not on his terms, but on the terms of

those who are yearning to be whole and made well, not necessarily those looking for forgiveness and a deeper, fuller relationship with God on earth and in heaven. Jesus became a miracle worker at the cost of being so much more—our ultimate Savior and Redeemer and Lord. He doesn't want the whole secret to come out until HE is ready to give his life on the cross. Even his disciples in Mark don't understand who he truly is and what it means. They don't want him to suffer, but from the beginning, here in Chapter 1, Jesus knows he must do exactly that to save us from our sin and death.

Jesus is willing to sacrifice his own freedom of movement in the world in order that the man in today's story might be freed of his leprosy. More important than that, this short story foreshadows the end of Jesus' life on earth when he sacrifices his life in order that all who believe in him

might live. Jesus is willing to live as a human and go where we go even to the grave so that we may follow him to heaven.

I am reminded of this hymn from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi: ***"You must have the same attitude that Christ had, though He was God he didn't think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took up the humble position of a slave and was born in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."***

It's heartening to me that at this early stage in Mark's gospel at least, Jesus was human enough, enough like us, to get just a bit ticked that he had to give something up for the sake of his mission. He wasn't quite ready to have the "cat out of the bag"—the man he healed went and got the ball rolling in spite of Jesus' reluctance.

He, like Jesus' disciples later in the book, didn't understand how much his sacrifice would cost him—his very life.

If only the man had gone to the priest like Jesus told him to, gave an offering and prayed a Psalm very much like Psalm 30, a psalm for thanksgiving for healing. We can be grateful that because he disobeyed, the gospel was spread. So let's read the psalm together in his honor. (Read Psalm 30 responsively)