

The Hand of the Lord Who Heals the Sick

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Matthew 8:1-4 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. ² And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." ³ Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

When I was in college, I worked for a few years delivering and picking up furniture for a rental company. One day we had to go pick up furniture from the filthiest house I have ever seen. There were swarms of flies inside the house. When you walked through the front door there were piles of garbage on either side. When I knelt to take apart the bed frame the carpet was sticky. Walking into that house made me feel contaminated.

Jesus walked into the filth of our sin, rather than being contaminated he made us clean. Jesus reaches out his hand to the leprous and the sick and with his touch he heals them. He cleanses them of their uncleanness and restores to them

the righteousness of God. He does not become unclean when he touches us. His touch makes us clean.

The hand of God who heals the sick.

In the bible the word leprosy is much broader than how we use it today. In scripture it could refer to almost any type of skin disease, especially anything that caused lesions and open soars on the skin. Some of these skin illnesses would heal on their own. Others like Hansen's Disease, which is what we usually mean when we talk about Leprosy, were usually lifelong. Most of the cases of leprosy that we hear about in the bible were probably Hansen's Disease, but the OT Laws included anyone with a sore or a white spot on the skin.

In the Old Testament anything that caused lesions on your skin made you unclean. As long as symptoms continued you were isolated from other people. The mosaic law demanded that you live "outside the camp," that you "touch no one," and that whenever anyone came near to you, you were to cry out, "unclean, unclean." If anyone touched a leprous person, that person too would be considered unclean.

These laws were a visual demonstration to the people and to us of a spiritual truth. The lesions and spots on the skin of a leprous person are a reminder of the sin that infects our souls. Just as the lepers were unclean because of their

disease, so we are unclean because of our sin. Just as they were cut off from the congregation because of their disease so we are cut off from God because of our sin.

But now we see Jesus, who is the lamb of God, "without spot or blemish." He reaches out his hand to touch and heal the leper. Anyone else who touched a leper would be made unclean, but Jesus is not made unclean. He makes the leper clean. Jesus who is spiritually clean comes among us who are spiritually unclean. He reaches out to touch us in our filth, to heal us and to make us clean.

There was no need for Jesus to touch the leper, but he does anyway.

In the section following our text a centurion asks for Jesus' help to heal his servant. Jesus offers to come with him, but the centurion says no. The centurion tells Jesus that Jesus' word will be enough.

"But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed."

Jesus' word has authority. Jesus' word is enough. Jesus' word heals the centurion's servant, stops the storm, and calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Jesus' word was enough to heal the leper, but Jesus also reaches out to touch the leper.

For one who had been ostracized, cut off from friends and family, this would have been a significant gesture. It shows a God who truly cares about his people. Even though the Leper is unclean, Jesus reaches out to touch him and to heal his disease.

Jesus' word is enough for us as well, with his word Jesus makes us who were unclean in our sin clean. Jesus also reaches out his finger to touch us. In the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper the Lord touches us who are unclean.

The Leper knows that Jesus can heal his leprosy. He asks Jesus if he is willing. And Jesus answer is yes.

Jesus is willing to heal our sickness.

If you look at the cover of your bulletin, you'll see a painting by Matthias Grünewald which was originally part of the altar piece at a monastic hospital in Isenheim, France. Although we are familiar with depictions of the crucifixion what makes this one a little different is that Matthias depicted Jesus as covered with skin sores. It is a visual depiction of the words of Isaiah 53:4, which the evangelist Matthew quotes in our text. **"Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows."**

What a great reminder to those who were sick in a hospital of the great healer who came to bear the worst sickness we have, the sickness of our sin. Jesus has indeed borne our illness. Yes, he can, and he does sometimes reach out his hand to heal our earthly diseases, but he is always there to heal our spiritual illness of sin.

The Lord is not deterred by our filthiness. There is no person who is too unclean for the Lord to reach out and touch. There is no person who is too far from God. The healing hand of Jesus cleanses our sin and heals all our diseases.