

JESUS HELPING THE LEPER

A Children's Homily by Dean Scotty McLennan University Public Worship at Stanford Memorial Church March 2, 2003

1) Good morning! **Do any of you know what the Bible lessonsⁱ were about today?** (About leprosy and Jesus healing a leper).

2) **What is leprosy?** (In its worse form, a disease where your skin can fall off; In the Bible, it meant scaly skin diseases of many kinds, which today we might call eczemaⁱⁱ, psoriasis,ⁱⁱⁱ acne -- red areas, dry flaky areas, pimples)

a) Generally not contagious, but in Jesus time thought so^{iv} b) Can be cured by medicine today, so you shouldn't worry

3) **Do you know what happened to lepers in Jesus' time?** (Lev.^v)

a) Had to leave home, family, friends and live alone outside of the community
b) No one could touch him or her, or even get close
c) Had to wear torn clothes, mess up his/her hair, cover the lower part of the face, and call out to anyone approaching "I'm unclean! I'm unclean!"

4) **What do you think Jesus would do if he met a leper?** (Mark^{vi})

a) "A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling, he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' **Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him**, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him."

5) **What do you think about that?**

a) Moved with pity
b) Touched him

6) **Let me show you a picture. What's it all about?**

a) In a book by a doctor named Robert Coles called The Spiritual Life of Children^{vii}
b) Drawn by a 9 year-old girl named Josephine
c) Asked what her favorite Bible story is -- picked up crayons and drew "Jesus Helping the Leper."

d) Explained why her favorite: "If you are really remembering Jesus, you remember the people he wanted to help."

e) "If we are to be Christians, we should try to find lepers and go be with them and help them. There aren't any lepers here...I don't think. When Jesus lived, there were lepers around -- and people would have nothing to do with them, the respectable people... There are lepers here, but they don't look like the lepers did back then [when Jesus lived]; I mean, they're not lepers,

but they are treated like lepers... Jesus had a lot of trouble to face when he went to a leper and was friendly and tried to make him better. People said lepers weren't people! That's what happens! If you're a Christian, you try to be like Jesus. It's good to pray to Him, but if you don't follow Him, then you're not being a Christian; you're [just] praying and going to church. There's a difference."^{viii}

7) Josephine says there are people around now who are treated by others as if they were lepers. What kind of people?

- a) Homeless
- b) AIDS patients
- c) Mentally ill
- d) Dying
- e) People who look different -- unfairly called terrorists

8) Look more closely at picture. What do you see in it?

- a) Jesus' colorful clothes and ravaged skin of leper.
- b) On brown earth, at some distance from a house surrounded by green grass and flowers.
- c) Two clouds above them, joined by a smiling sun.^{ix}

9) What do you think the point of this Bible lesson is?

- a) Josephine says: "The leper was there, [alone] in the desert."
- b) "Jesus saw the leper and his heart went out to him."
- c) "He stopped and spoke with the man, [and He touched him] and He healed him."

d) "Probably the leper felt much better. Maybe he went and ate with Jesus. I don't know. I'm sure Jesus wouldn't be afraid to eat with the leper. I'll bet lots of people were afraid, though, and they probably said bad things about the leper, and probably they thought he was going to die and go to hell -- but not Jesus [Josephine's emphasis]."^x

10) What does this mean for us?

- a) But not Jesus, and hopefully not us
- a) Need to care about people who are suffering, especially those who are alone and being ignored by everyone
- b) "Reach out and touch someone" -- We each know how good it feels to be hugged when sick, or everyone's making fun of and making feel bad
- c) Try to follow what Jesus did -- Felt deeply for him, and stretched out his hand and touched him, even though people said he was unclean.
- d) Let us go and, at least in some small way, try to do the same -- with people who feel alone, and are hurting, and don't feel loved.

NOTES

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- i. Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46; Mark 1:40-45.
 - ii. New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), Vol. I, pp. 1094-1095.
 - iii. New Jerome Biblical Commentary (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 601.
 - iv. Ibid., p. 69.
 - v. Leviticus 13:44-46.
 - vi. Mark 1:40-42.
 - vii. Robert Coles, The Spiritual Life of Children (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990).
 - viii. Ibid., pp. 174-175.
 - ix. Ibid., p. 175.
 - x. Ibid.