

This morning we continue in our series we've been in this summer looking at Jesus' interactions with people on a personal basis, and what this means for us in our relationship with Him. (Thankful for Gwen and Danna filling in the last two Sundays! Hopefully you were here or you'll listen to their messages online as I will...)

This morning we're in Luke 5:12-16. And in this passage we see a man who comes to Jesus and has his life radically changed forever, and in doing so, Jesus challenges some assumptions and expectations. (9:30 - I invite you to open your Bibles, follow along, and listen to the passage...)

So this man comes to Jesus with a skin disease that's all over him. Luke tells us that he's covered with it. The Greek word that's used is lepras. It was used for a variety of skin diseases, but most Bibles translate it leprosy, because leprosy was so problematic and common. So almost certainly this is what the man had.

Now, we need to understand something about leprosy, because most of us aren't probably familiar with it. We think of skin diseases or skin problems, and we think of eczema, or rashes, getting a sunburn, and so forth...and they're a nuisance, but with a little medical attention, usually even just self-administered, they go away. Leprosy was, and still is, vicious, though it's much more containable today than it was in Jesus' day. It starts out as a rash, oftentimes kind of splotchy **(Picture Here)**. It's contagious, and as a result people with leprosy were relegated to colonies of lepers. In fact, in some parts of the world, they still do that, such as in India, where there are still over 1,000 leper colonies. It is curable with medicine today, but in Jesus' day, it was essentially incurable. Left untreated, it progresses and invades further, oftentimes reducing fingers and toes to stubs, such as in **this picture** of a person's hands. It eats



away at the nerves over time, which results in a gradual numbing of the skin in the affected areas, but is otherwise painful.¹ This was, and still is, a horrible disease that spreads easily, though doctors don't entirely know how it spreads.

In Jesus' day, people who contracted leprosy were essentially banned from the cities and towns. When they did go out in public places, they were supposed to cry out "unclean, unclean" so that people would know to stay away from them (Leviticus 13:45). So there was a strong sense of public disgrace; people with leprosy weren't liked by the public in general; they were totally ostracized, and made to feel worthless.

Some of us here this morning perhaps feel that way: lonely, ostracized by the community around us, unworthy of God's love. Maybe you feel like you are cast out by society, ignored and unloved, type-casted as not worthy of the attention of people. That's how this man would have felt. But he does something that's wise: he comes to Jesus, who is able to heal him. And Jesus does the same with you and me.

For this man, coming to Jesus was a step of faith. It was embarrassing to come out into public, crying out "unclean, unclean" and identifying himself publicly as a leper. But that's exactly what he would have done in order to walk through the city and come to Jesus. Maybe you've felt the same way. Maybe embarrassment has prevented you from coming to Jesus and seeking to be healed of sin, addictions, anger problems, or whatever else it may be that separates you from God and from the people in your life. **So often, we don't want to acknowledge our own "uncleanness" to anyone else or to Jesus...or even to ourselves.** We'd rather pretend that we're just fine and that our problems are the fault of people around us, rather than acknowledging our sins and our mistreatment of people, and coming to the one who can make us better. And we avoid that all because it might be a little embarrassing.

Some of you may remember the Academy-award nominated actress, Billie Burke. Once, while she was on vacation on a cruise ship, she noticed that a gentleman at the next table was suffering from a bad cold. "Are you

uncomfortable?" she asked sympathetically. The man nodded. "I'll tell you just what to do for it," she offered. "Go back to your room and drink lots of orange juice. Take two aspirins. Cover yourself with all the blankets you can find. Sweat the cold out. I know just what I'm talking about. I'm Billie Burke from Hollywood." The man smiled warmly and introduced himself in return. "Thanks," he said, "I'm Dr. Mayo from the Mayo clinic."ⁱⁱⁱ A little embarrassing or at least awkward for her perhaps, right? But she reached out to help the man in the way she knew how.

Just as this leprous man suffered through the embarrassment, the stares, the humiliation of calling out "unclean" as he walked through town: **You and I can face the reality of our own situations, and admit our need for Jesus' healing touch.** Even if it's embarrassing or awkward or just a little uncomfortable. It's a step of faith, just as this man comes to him in faith. And that's the first thing I want to highlight for us here.

Now I said a moment ago that there are some unexpected things that happen here. Both of them have to do with Jesus, and they're the second and third point to take away from this passage. The first unexpected thing is that he healed the wrong guy. And secondly, he healed him in the wrong way.

There was a cartoon drawing a number of years ago that showed a fourth-grade boy standing toe-to-toe and nose-to-nose with his teacher. Behind them was a blackboard covered with math problems the boy hadn't finished. And in the caption below the boy was saying to the teacher, "I'm not an underachiever, you're an overexpecter!" Have you ever wanted to say something like that to somebody else? It's a great line. Or maybe you're the one who over-expects from others? Our problem in our approach to Jesus is that we expect *too little* of him, not too much. And as a result, he shatters our expectations all the time, and we see that here.

First we see: **Who Jesus heals shatters our expectations.** No one gathered there around Jesus would have expected Him to heal a leper. It's not that he hadn't healed people yet. He did, as Luke records for us earlier in chapter 5 and in chapter 4. Even later in his ministry, though, Jesus healed and ministered to people that shattered expectations. And so this guy just is not

the kind of person they would have expected Jesus to help. Lepers were too ostracized, too dangerous to the public health, too much of a nuisance. They were sent away from the public eye. They were beyond help, in their minds. Someone had to be thinking, “He’s healing the wrong person.” But Jesus shows us here that the Good News really is for everyone, including the cast-offs of society. He wants to connect personally with people, no matter who they are.

Jesus lives this out elsewhere, too. For instance, later on (Luke 19) he visits Zacchaeus, who was a tax collector (and wealthy), and after a nice conversation with him, Jesus pronounces that salvation has come to him and to his household. Tax collectors were about on par with lepers in their day – though for different reasons and with more of a sense of hatred and despising! Talk about shattering people’s expectations! Luke records that people couldn’t believe Jesus was eating at tax collector’s house. Later still, Luke records for us the conversation between the two criminals who were put up on their own crosses next to Jesus. And when one of them makes a statement confessing his sin and wrong behavior and asks Jesus to remember him, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” That is an expectation-shattering statement. So Jesus shatters expectations all the time about who he will welcome into his presence and upon whom he will bestow his grace.

Who in your life have you written off as too far gone to come to Jesus?

Or maybe you feel like you’re that person. Maybe just by coming to church today in the middle of August and not at Christmas or Easter... maybe you’ve shattered some expectations: either your own or somebody else’s. Jesus will welcome you and heal you if you’ll come to him in faith, or if you’ll help those people in your life to come to Jesus. His grace and forgiveness can be a part of each of our lives.

Secondly: **How Jesus heals shatters our expectations.** Jesus broke through their expectations by touching this man. That was a sure-fire way of getting leprosy. That broke all the social and medical boundaries. The last thing a healthy person wanted to do was to touch a leper. This action by Jesus was totally unexpected by the people gathered there, and probably, quite frankly,

by the man who received the healing. He came in faith believing that Jesus could heal him, but I don't think he expected Jesus to reach out and touch him. But that's what Jesus did.

We see here: **Jesus might surprise us by how he goes about giving us, or other people, a new life.** How Jesus brings about healing for our past mistakes and our sin just might shatter our expectations, because it happens differently for all of us: Some people might be touched by Jesus through a sermon. Some might be touched through a prayer. Some might be touched through a hymn, others through a rock worship song. ☺ Some might be touched through serving. Some might have a radical, instantaneous transformation, while others might be slow and over time, and could be painful. Sometimes our past catches up to us and the healing is hard and full of bumps along the way. But the new life that can be yours and mine is always found through Jesus Christ. All it takes is a relationship with Him. Then, with Jesus touching our hearts and our lives, the new way of life will come, even if He busts our expectations of how that would happen.

Now, notice that after the man was healed, Jesus sent him away to show himself to the priest and to offer a sacrifice for his cleansing to testify about his healing. This comes straight out of the Old Testament, Leviticus 13 and 14. This was the way of publicly acknowledging that he was healed and reinstated to society, as the priest would pronounce him good to go, and then an offering would be made to praise God for the healing. But we see that **It was also a testimony of what Jesus had done in his life.** As we saw a few weeks ago and we see elsewhere on occasion: Jesus told him not to tell anyone about this – presumably other than the priest. Jesus never explains why he asks people to keep quiet, but the general consensus is that Jesus did this in order to buy time for his ministry and get the 12 disciples, and others to a lesser extent, trained and equipped and prepared to be the leaders of this little movement once he moved on. He still only got three years, and anything less would only make things more difficult for them. But he cared enough about this guy that he wanted him to be fully reinstated in society, so he goes and shows himself to the priest, offers the sacrifices as a testimony, and is declared clean.

You see, when we've been healed by Christ, when we've experienced his forgiveness and have put our trust in him, we bear testimony to it. It shows up in our lives. **There's evidence of having been touched by Jesus Christ, because the leprous stuff that used to mark our lives is replaced by health, wholeness, and Godly living.** Even if we don't tell anyone about it – which Jesus wants us to do now – his healing presence in us shows. And there are certain ceremonial things we do – like this guy did – to demonstrate our new life in Christ. Baptism is one sign of that testimony. It's the way we show that Jesus has made us new and we're forgiven. And communion is a continuance of that. In communion we remember what Christ has done for us on the cross and that we have received his forgiveness, grace, and healing in our lives as well. And from there, we bear witness to God's grace in our lives in other ways as well as we live out our faith, and live more like Jesus. We're called to now be the ones who reach out to those who are sick, who are on the margins of society, and so forth...and also those who are able to mask their sins and their problems in life with a façade that others can't afford. The point is, we all need Jesus' healing touch.

The last thing I want to note – is the final verse that tells us **Jesus oftentimes withdrew to “lonely places and prayed.”** We touched on this a bit a few weeks ago as well. We all need that kind of time seeking refreshment and being encouraged in our faith. For many of us, the summer time provides an opportunity to step away from some of the routines of life that we have the rest of the year, and get some dedicated time to recharge our spiritual batteries...to spend a little prolonged time reading our Bibles, or in prayer, or taking an honest assessment of our lives and laying out some goals for the coming year for spiritual growth and faith development and serving as God calls us. We all need that kind of time occasionally, just as Jesus did. And I hope you will find that time – or maybe you already have this summer. Or maybe this is your busy season and you can get some refreshment when you push through this time. But often in those quiet times, God will open our eyes up to how He's healing us, encouraging us, strengthening us for what lies ahead. His healing touch, healing voice, healing presence, will come to you then. It's not the only time or way it happens, but it's an important one.

But Jesus isn't the only one who gets refreshed here. That's what happens to

this man, too. His healing undoubtedly refreshed him and connected him to Jesus in a powerful way, and refreshed him. So, what in your life needs refreshing? Maybe it's beyond what that word might lead you to think about, and you need a full on healing in some facet of your life. Saw "The Last Jedi" last night...common theme in Star Wars movies about "darkness and light" inside each person and the conflict between the two. Where is the darkness getting a foothold and gaining an advantage in you? Because, like leprosy, sin often starts out small, kind of patchy, a little bothersome. But over time, if not treated, it spreads. It eats away at us. It can get embarrassing. And it can infect others, too. **What in your life is threatening to be leprosy? Where is healing or refreshment needed?** This man shows us that we can come to Jesus no matter what it is, and no matter how others may view us because of our unhealthy living. Jesus is not scared off by that stuff, even when others are. The relationship he has with you, or wants to have with you, is too important. His desire to heal is too great. And so we see that Jesus will welcome us into his presence and heal us. And both welcoming us into his presence, and healing us will shatter expectations – our own, others, or both. But that's God's nature. He is willing to welcome us, or the people in your life that you or others have written off as beyond his reach...And Jesus will reach out and touch us, refresh us, heal us, and change our lives and the lives of people around us, when we come to him in faith. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Wikipedia has a good article on leprosy if you wish to find out more:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy>

ⁱⁱ Sermonillustrations.com