

THE FIRST 15

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By: Jan Davis

God designed us to live in community. He knows healthy relationships will bless us. This week we study the healing miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Not only does Jesus heal physical infirmity, He also frees people from places of isolation and restores them to community.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed and holy Lord, as a new day dawns I seek Your gracious presence. I quiet the busy chatter of my mind, still my body and rest in the goodness of Your love. Help me hear the message You have for me today. Thank You for the blessings of a life lived in community with others. I am grateful for my relationship with You and my relationships with family and friends. May the cornerstone of my life and our life together be Christ and Christ alone. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. Luke 5:12-15

REFLECTION

Jesus encounters a man who is in advanced stages of leprosy. Leprosy could be a number of communicable skin diseases in Biblical times. Old Testament law gave the priest the responsibility to diagnose a skin disease, banish the individual if contagious, determine if and when the disease healed, and restore the person to society. A painful and debilitating disease, there was no known cure for leprosy and many people were banished for life.

The most terrible thing about leprosy was the isolation it brought. The leper was to cry "unclean, unclean" wherever he went. He or she was to dwell alone outside the camp. The leper was banished from society, shunned and despised. If you came in contact with a leper you had to be isolated too, until it was certain you did not contract the disease. The psychological consequences for the leper were as serious as the physical.

The leper falls with his face to the ground in front of Jesus. He is confident Jesus is able to heal him, but he is not sure Jesus will choose to heal him. Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said. Jesus' hand went out to the man from whom everyone else would have turned away from in fear or pulled away in horror. Jesus touches the person whom law and custom prevented from being touched and insisted be shunned and banished. By touching the leper Jesus not only heals his disease, He restores him to human community.

Jesus enters into the man's suffering, isolation and shame. Jesus is not offering long distance relief. By touching the man, Jesus becomes ritually unclean and takes on his suffering and disease. To help a leper you enter the leper colony. In the same way Jesus does not distance himself from us, He enters into our suffering, pain and sin. Jesus entered into the world to be incarnate, to put on flesh, to dwell with us. Jesus moved into the neighborhood fully divine and fully human. Jesus went to the cross to take on our sin. The sin of the entire world was placed upon His body and His blood was shed so that each of our sins can be forgiven and we can be redeemed. He became sin for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

When we are diagnosed with disease. When we are sick. When we are suffering. When we are isolated. When we feel alone. When we are forgotten. When our hearts are broken. When we grieve. When we have failed. When we have let someone down. When we have sinned. When we regret. When our hearts are filled with shame. Christ's hand stretches out to us. Jesus reaches out to forgive, strengthen, heal, cleanse, return and restore us with the power of His loving touch.

Because we are recipients of His love, we join Him in demonstrating that love to the world around us. We are invited to enter into the suffering of others. It is the very essence of Christianity to sit with the suffering, to comfort the broken hearted, to bring community to the lonely, to touch the untouchable, to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgivable. We are able, but are we willing?

Ask: When have I felt isolated, alone or separated from the love of God or others? Where do I need God to restore my relationships or bring me into the fellowship of community? How can I reach out to someone who is isolated or alone?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed and Holy Lord Jesus, as the leper fell prostrate at your feet recognizing his desperate state, so I come to you acknowledging the depths of my sorrow, sin, remorse and regret. Touch me and what was once scarlet will be whiter than snow, heal me and I will be clean. Thank you for entering into this broken world and loving me with so great a love. Heal my relationships, restore my brokenness, purify my intentions, and fill me with compassion for the lost and the lonely. Amen.