

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When reading a passage of Scripture, it is important for us to ask the question, “How does this apply to my life today?” The question before us, as we read this miracle story is, “What could we today, in the twenty-first century, have in common with a first century leper?” We need to get beyond thinking that this story is only nice and interesting, but it really doesn’t address many modern issues.

One of the ways to look at the story of Jesus healing the leper is to see the story symbolically. The Bible is full of symbols. For example, fire and clouds are always physical evidence of God’s presence. A fire/cloud led the people of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land. A cloud descended on Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. A cloud engulfed the Mount of Transfiguration. Water is another symbol in the Bible that often represents chaos. At the time of creation, God brought land (order) out of chaos (the sea). Jonah’s life, when lived in opposition to God’s will, was threatened with chaos—the stormy sea. The disciples were threatened with the chaotic waters of the Sea of Galilee when they tried to cross it with Jesus. A third symbol is leprosy. The Church has always seen leprosy as a symbol or an allegory for sin. Studying this story of Jesus healing the leper reminds us of sin’s effect upon our lives and how God ministers to our sinfulness.

Leprosy separated the person from the rest of society. The leper could not have any social interaction except with other lepers, and the leper was barred from the temple and other places of worship. Sin separates us from God and from those around us. Sin is a relationship breaker. Unlike leprosy, though, we often deny the effects of sin in our lives and in our relationships, or we are blissfully unaware of its destructive nature.

Graphic examples of the effects of sin come from people and families that are suffering the effects of chemical dependency. The person who is chemically dependent usually does not realize the effect that his or her sickness is having upon the people around him or her. It is only during an intervention that the stark reality of the destructive nature of his or her sickness is revealed. Even then the person who is chemically dependent may deny what others tell him or her. Only when the person is willing to accept that they are an addict can any healing take place. Only then can the bridge between the addict and their family be repaired. Likewise, only God can bridge

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the gap between us and bring us back into relationship with him, just like Jesus needed to reach out and bring the leper back into society.

There are several sicknesses like colds and flus that we can get over by ourselves. All we need to do is to take some medicine, drink plenty of fluids, and get a lot of rest. Leprosy and sin however, are not self-curable. And even though we know that our sin isn't self-curable, we still try to cure ourselves from the effects of sin in our lives, in many ways:

- We stress self-improvement to sinless perfection, a righteous life, or to fulfilling our true potential. The bookstore is full of books trying to show people how to “perfect” themselves.
- We involve ourselves in good works—not out of thankfulness for God's love, but hoping to impress God and others that we really are “good” people. Doing good works is meant to be an act of service to God in thanks for His gifts, not to be seen as a “gift to the community.”
- We focus on success, fame, fortune and the other gods of this world, rather than striving to be obedient and faithful to the one true God. We like these other gods, because they do what we want, not what we need. It's easier to chase after money than it is to follow Christ, but only one way leads to eternal life.

The only way the leper in this recounting that we heard in our Gospel could be healed is to admit to Jesus that he was sick and request that Jesus heal him. Once he approached Jesus, Jesus reached out, touched him and healed him—immediately. Jesus did that because He loved this man.

God loves us even in our rebellious and sinful state. But God wants us to live in a new, abundant, and dynamic relationship with him. God shows us his desire for us over and over again. Even in the Gospel, God's love was apparent.

- Jesus said, “I will, be clean,” to the leper.
- Jesus reached out and touched the man, healing him from his disease.
- Jesus went to the cross for us, suffered, died, and rose again for us.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are able to have a relationship with God and to live in faith, obedience and righteousness before our heavenly Father. This is not accomplished by our own efforts. It is a gift of God through the cross of Jesus Christ.

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We learn a lot from this story of the Jesus healing the leper. We learn that it is necessary for us to daily acknowledge who we are (sinners) and the effects of sin in our lives and in our relationships. Every day we can receive the salvation that God offers to us, and rejoice in that salvation through thanksgiving, witnessing and serving. May you all be so blessed in your comings in and your goings out from this day and forevermore.

Amen