

## Faith In Action: The Power of Compassion

Luke 5: 12-26

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

When Pastor Scott prefaced last Sunday's message with stories of leper colonies full of suffering people who can feel no pain — and particularly the truth that pain is important in life because it signals to us that something is wrong, I recalled a scene that has always stuck with me from the movie "Star Trek V: The Final Frontier."

When a seemingly magic individual shows he can take away crew members' pain, Captain Kirk wisely refuses the offer, arguing that our pain is part of "who we are" and erasing it will result in us losing our very selves. "I don't want my pain taken away, I need my pain!" Kirk hollers in defiance.

As Pastor Scott told us before moving into the Gospel account in Luke 5:12-26, the reality of pain — both physical and emotional — is part of our fallen world. No one enjoys either kind of pain, and when pain is particularly intense, we deeply long for relief.

First, a leper approaches Jesus, and he's suffering with intense emotional pain. Lepers were outcasts in Israel, forced to live their days cut off from the community — and even announce "Unclean! Unclean!" to those who might get too close to them. What a lonely, depressing existence!

But when the leper tells Jesus, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean," Jesus does the unthinkable, topples the social conventions of the day, and says, "I will; be clean" and then actually touches the leper! Can you imagine what that felt like to the leper? How many years had it been since he received human touch? God says in Genesis that it's not good for us to be alone — but one can argue pretty convincingly that the Lord doesn't mean that ONLY marriage meets that need! God wants us in community with him and with each other, no matter our marital status.

With that, the leprosy left the man, and Jesus commanded him to tell no one about what just happened to him but instead to "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

Pastor Scott told us that this was one way Jesus demonstrated compassion to the priests, who would examine the man and see that he had been healed — and now the door was open if they wanted to find out more about Jesus.

I appreciated Pastor Scott informing us that the Greek word for "clean" in this passage is used in other spots in Scripture, particularly later in Luke when Jesus calls out the

Pharisees for being like “whitewashed tombs” — except that their “clean” status is a surface-layer illusion, because inside where it really counts, they are like rotting corpses. Another spot featuring “clean” is found in 1 John 1:9, and this is much more hopeful, as we’re told that when we confess our sins, Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness. What a promise! Indeed, that’s what we all need at the very core of things.

Is unconfessed sin crippling you today? Pastor Scott reminded us that confessing our sins and getting back on the right track with God will turn our lives right around — and we can always come to the Lord with anything on our minds and hearts.

The second account in this passage describes Jesus healing the paralytic — but by now crowds had heard of him and were flooding the spots where Jesus spoke. Even the Pharisees and the teachers of the law came from far and wide — indeed “from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem” — to find out more about Jesus. So yes, Jesus has a huge audience on this day.

The tension culminated with friends of a paralytic lowering the suffering man through the roof of a home so that Jesus might heal him. Jesus in that moment sees the faith of the paralytic’s friends and then says, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”

Uh oh! It was common knowledge among Jews that only God can forgive sins, not a man — so once again we find Jesus challenging the order of things and the spiritual assumptions of the day. But Jesus also knows exactly what’s on the hearts of the “elite” around him, and he presents them with one of his all-time great questions: “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — he said to the man who was paralyzed — “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

Sure enough, the paralytic at that moment is no longer a paralytic!

The final verses of the passage read, “And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’”

Pastor Scott asked us as he closed his message what “mosaic” — a beautiful work of art made from broken pieces — is God making in our lives right now. Have we opened our eyes to experience the “amazement” the Lord provides us, as well as the “extraordinary things” Jesus is up to?

Let us this week open our hearts, minds, and eyes to God’s promises to us — even amid our emotional pain, physical pain, or even both types. The Lord is in control of

how our pain affects us — and he knows if it's best to take it away or not. Let's trust him!