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Healing Stories “Touch of Love”

Luke 5:12-14 (The Message)

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Three verses only, really!

Let’s not fool ourselves thinking this is going to be just fluff. Because in these three verses we have much that will aid us in our faith and life. Let’s not sell these few verses short, because in them we learn lots about Jesus as healer and the role we are to play as his disciples.

Let’s get right to the meat of it – this man had leprosy. What we now call Hansen’s disease. And it was not just a mild case. Scripture says he was “covered with leprosy.” And just what does that mean? It means the leprosy covered up who he was. It means it was now his complete identity. Sometimes we see ourselves as merely our malady. Sometimes others see us as just one thing, especially if they think that one thing is bad or is something they do not have.

It means, this person was now a part of the living dead. No one ever dies from this disease. Rather, it numbs your nerves. It makes it so you can’t feel. You have lost your nerve. In other words, you cut your finger deeply while chopping vegetables and yet you don’t know it because you can’t feel anymore. You sit next to the fire to warm up, and in so doing get sleepy and then while you’re doing some zzz’s you tip over and roll in fire and don’t jump when scorched, rather you just get severely burnt because you are numb. As if this was not enough already, the disease goes on to affect your larynx so you can no longer speak up.

Truth is, 90% of us have a natural immunity to leprosy, which is great news for us. I know you have already done the math, so you are either relieved you are in the 90% who still can feel, who still have some nerve, who continue speaking up. Or you have a sudden depth of sadness because you know you are one of the 10% who has lost the ability to feel, you find that nothing touches a nerve, and that your voice is so constricted that you are unable to speak of the gravity of your situation.

In 2018, there were 208,000 new cases of leprosy worldwide. I would dare to bet that there are way more folks here and abroad who have become numb, who have lost their nerve, who no longer can feel a thing, who walk through life as the living dead.

Leprosy has an average incubation period of five years. Those who have become completely numb have it come to fruition over a period of years. Being numb does just happen one day. That which renders you devoid of feelings and the ability to express them happens over time, not all at once. And like leprosy, which takes from one to twenty years to show symptoms, our disease builds over time and in those ensuing years, we become numb and more numb, till our symptoms are for all to see. We have completely zoned out as a way to protect ourselves. Yet, in so doing we have put ourselves even further in harms way.

Enough bad news, let's get onto the good news.

First, let's start with what the leper has to say. He speaks up with the words, "if you want to, you can cleanse me". What was it inside this man that caused him to think that what he needed done, which had not been in 700 years, could be done for him. For up to that point there were only two instances of lepers being healed in the Old Testament. One was Miriam

(Moses's sister) with a leprosy that lasted only seven days, and the other was Naaman captain of the Syrian Army who was healed by the prophet Elisha, but not in the way he wanted. Instead of receiving his healing from the rivers in his own homeland, he was healed in the presence of his enemies by dipping repeatedly in the Jordan River.

The leper in our story from Luke chapter five did not want healing. Instead he wanted cleansing. Some of us must be made clean before we can be whole. What am I trying to say is, sometimes we need to have things expressed and expelled and not healed over or suddenly disappear. We need to see it leave us before we can feel whole again.

In the end, like leprosy, numbing always leads to isolation. The world fear what we have and then others no longer want to see us, they want us to warn them we are a mess and it would be better for all, if that did not get too close. This is what others began to think and those will such a dis ease begin to believe that about themselves too.

In those times and in our own, when what others have frightens us and we don't know how to respond, we ask them to not be near us and in so doing isolate them. Then, if we feel super afraid, we tell others they are a mess or we make them in one way or another declare it themselves. If someone tells you long enough you are a mess, we too will eventually believe it and declare it to the world. In your own words, in one way or another you end us saying, "Leper, leper, don't get near. I am toxic and what I have is highly contagious. I will ruin your life too."

Lepers were made to live on the outskirts. They were only allowed to be so close to others. Often when others felt they

were too close they would throw dirt on them and even throw stones at them. Does that sound like anyone you know? In it, you may even recognize yourself.

This leper for whatever reason got a burst of chutzpah. He took the chance of getting 39 lashes, which was the consequence for any leper who came within six feet of anyone. He took that chance for the chance to be made whole.

It is then, that we, we see Jesus the Interrupter – the interrupter of patterns of behavior that needed to cease.

So, what does Jesus do – he touches the leper. The touch of love always cleanses. Upon feeling the power of love, there is a leaving of that, which has been trying to kill us. When we are touched by love we cannot remain untouched. Through the very power of love, we can begin to feel again.

Yes, sometimes hurt continues, but it is not leprous, for it no longer eats at us or takes from us – our dignity, our worth, our newfound wholeness. Instead, it bruises a bit, but it does not return us to the living dead.

The sequence of events in scripture comes to us not as accident or via some sloppy writer. Rather, the unfolding of events and their sequence is important. So, what happens in the verses just prior to our reading from Luke 5 for today. Jesus comes fresh from the temptations in the wilderness to the calling of his first disciples - the fishermen Simon, James and John. As he calls them, he tells them they will be fishing for men and women.

In the throwing out of our lines of connection in the spirit of love we will be sure to catch others, and in so doing they will be hooked. Hooked on the power of love.

As Jesus current disciples reach out and touch someone today, tomorrow, and the day after that. For only by reaching out in love does our fear disappear, and the antiseptic gets applied and in the doing of such, we are all made whole.

*Anyone who feels the need for cleansing would like to receive healing is invited to express your desire to receive healing by opening your hands in this time and place, to the healing touch of Jesus as we pray.*

Jesus, our Great Physician,  
For those who feel the need for cleansing, we ask for your healing touch for them, so that all will know new life and wholeness. Amen.