

Encountering Jesus

Luke 5.12-16

The 3rd Encounter: "I am willing. Be healed."

- ▶ The first—and always—way that we encounter Jesus is in the Word (Luke 5.1). Jesus himself said that the Scriptures testify about him (John 5.39).
- ▶ The second way that we encounter Jesus is in our recognition of our sinfulness (Luke 5.8), leading us to understand that following him and his way is worth leaving—and losing—everything else in life (Luke 5.11).

Luke 5.12-16

Matthew 8.1-4

Mark 1.40-45

- ▶ Jesus encounters a leper—
 - (1) The leper's condition: an “advanced case” of leprosy
 - (2) His approach: “suddenly”
 - (3) His posture: he knelt, begging, with his face to the ground
 - (4) His request: “If you are willing, you can make me clean”

- ▶ Jesus' reaction to the leper—
 - (1) He is moved with compassion and touches the leper
 - (2) Jesus expresses his willingness to heal

- ▶ Jesus' directives—
 - (1) “Do not tell anyone”
 - (2) Fulfill the requirements of the Law for those healed of leprosy as a public testimony of his healing
- ▶ The resulting acclaim: large crowds came to hear Jesus and be healed of their sicknesses
- ▶ Jesus frequently withdraws to the wilderness to pray

The walking dead—

In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. (5.12)

- ▶ As a physician, Luke is specific in his diagnosis of the condition of the leper: this was an “advanced case” of leprosy.
- ▶ Lepers were considered to be the “walking dead”—the ultimate victims of an incurable disease; cut off from everyone and everything, they were literally the “walking dead.”

- ▶ The medical, social, and spiritual consequences of leprosy made it the worst case scenario for one's life. Medically—
 - ▶ The incubation period was slow, averaging five years.
 - ▶ Began with fatigue and joint pain, followed by white spots.
 - ▶ The spots evolved into hard bumps that developed into grotesque scaly protrusions, emitting a repugnant odor.
 - ▶ It attacked the nervous system, leading to a loss of sensation.
 - ▶ As the disease advanced, fingers and toes deteriorated becoming nubs; facial features were distorted.

▶ Socially—

- ▶ Lepers existed in absolute social isolation; they were required to wear ragged clothing, leave their hair uncombed, and call out, “unclean, unclean” as a warning to people not to come any closer than 150 feet.
- ▶ Lepers were not only stripped of health, they were stripped of their identity, occupations, families, and participation in the most distinctive aspect of their culture: worship.
- ▶ They were the ultimate victims, the “untouchables.”

- ▶ Spiritually—
 - ▶ Leprosy was seen as divine judgment—
 - ▶ Mariam (Numbers 12.9-16)
 - ▶ Gehazi (2 Kings 5.27)
 - ▶ King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26.20)
 - ▶ Only the “LORD God” (YHWH Elohim) could reverse leprosy and effect a cure. Otherwise, it remained incurable and fatal.
 - ▶ Healing could only be effected through a prophet.

We are all lepers—

- ▶ Theologically, leprosy is representative of sin and the spiritual condition of every person—
 - ▶ Sin begins small, an unseen infection with no immediate effects or consequences (James 1.14).
 - ▶ It numbs our conscience, causing us to lose spiritual sensitivity—damaging our souls and our relationships to God and others (Hebrews 3.12; Ephesians 4.18-19).
 - ▶ Sin results in spiritual separation (Isaiah 59.2)

- ▶ Human ability cannot cure or reverse the effects of sin (Jeremiah 17.9; Psalm 130.8; Jeremiah 3.22).
- ▶ Inevitably and invariably, sin results in death (Romans 6.23).
- ▶ The only cure for sin is to come to Jesus as the leper did—desperately, humbly trusting in the compassion, ability, and efficacy of Jesus—

“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

The deep-feeling Jesus—

Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed. (Mark 1.44-45)

- ▶ All of the Synoptic writers make note of this detail: Jesus reached out and touched the “untouchable” leper. It was an extraordinary and visible demonstration of grace vs. law. Anyone who touched a leper would themselves become unclean. But when Jesus touched the leper, the leper received Jesus’ “cleanness”!

- ▶ There is another detail which Mark emphasizes: Jesus was moved, or filled, with compassion for this man—his plight, and the consequences of leprosy which had ravaged his life. The *Disciples' Literal New Testament* translates it this way:

And having felt-deep-feelings [of compassion], having stretched-out His hand, He touched *him*. And He says to him, “I am willing. Be cleansed”.

- ▶ Throughout his ministry, Jesus is characterized as having and being motivated to action by his “felt-deep feelings” of compassion.

Since the children have flesh and blood, ***he too shared in their humanity*** so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason ***he had to be made like them, fully human in every way***, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2.14-18)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4.15)

For we do not have a high priest not being able to sympathize-with our weaknesses, but *One* having been tempted in all *things* in accordance with *our* likeness, without sin. (DLNT)

- ▶ Theologically, the Scriptures teach that Jesus, as God-Incarnate (the Word that became flesh, John 1.14) was fully God and fully human. That is, he retained all of his “God-nature” while also “partaking fully” of human nature.
- ▶ What do the Scriptures mean when they tell us that Jesus was fully human, made like us in every way? That he experienced “felt-deep feelings” about the human condition?

- ▶ If Jesus were to take a Meyer-Briggs personality assessment, what would his personality profile be: ISFJ (the most common) or INFJ (the rarest)?
- ▶ Over the last two decades, neuroscience and psychology have gained amazing insights into our humanness; terms like empath, highly sensitive personality, emotional intelligence, and “mirror neurons” have become common understanding about how we feel and relate to others.

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

(Exodus 34.5-7)

- ▶ Jesus, being filled with compassion, “mirrored” the compassion of YHWH. He also experienced the pain of seeing what sin had done to His perfect creation, to those made in His image, and Jesus carried this pain in his soul to the cross.
- ▶ Two important truths for us:
 - (1) Jesus knows from experience precisely what you are experiencing, and he is filled with compassion toward you;
 - (2) We encounter God’s character in the way that He interacts with the human race; this is how we are reshaped from our human condition into God’s likeness and goodness.

The “I am willing” Jesus—

Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed. (Mark 1.44-45)

- ▶ This statement of just three words is theologically profound, revealing the heart of God and the mission of Jesus to reverse the leprosy of our sinful condition. Filled with love Jesus came to identify with, redeem, and restore sinners. And so he says to us:

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14.13). Ask! He is more than willing!