

Jesus Sighting: With an Outcast

Luke 5:12-16 (NLT)

January 24, 2016

Rev. Dave Baldridge

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

Back in the late '70's and early 80's Bell/At&T had a string of commercials that said **(IMAGE)** "Reach Out and Touch Someone." (Check that phone out...on the wall...and what is that thing attached to it....oh it is the cord for the phone!)

Today we see a Jesus Sighting with an Outcast....and Jesus reach's out and touches someone.

This picture of a person **(IMAGE of Howie Mandel)** is someone who literally does not like to reach out and touch someone. Famous for the game show "Deal or No Deal" and of late being one of the judges on America's Got Talent he doesn't shake hands. He gives fist bumps instead. He has mysophobia....a pathological fear of contamination and germs. He is so afraid of touching someone and 'catching' something.

Now when I go to visit people in the hospital I will use the hand sanitizer by the door on the way in AND on the way out. Even though I will often reach and touch...and shake the hand of the one in the hospital bed. Oh, there are times when someone is in isolation where we have to gown, mask, and wear gloves. If I am able, even with gloves on, I still shake hands. There is something about 'touch.' Now at the end of every service we have a tradition of holding hands. Now if you have a cold or are feeling 'germy' you don't have to hold hands....just instead politely say, 'I better not today.' Or you could put hand on the other person's shoulder, or perhaps rather than hand to hand, put your elbow against their elbow. Howie Mandel doesn't shake hands or hold hands...instead...a fist bump. It's important to reach out and touch!

Now let's get to our scripture where we find Jesus reaching out to someone that is not use to being reached out to.

Jesus meets a man with advanced leprosy. Let's get a Biblical and historical perspective of what leprosy is. Leprosy is a disease that pretty much has now been eradicated. It was a chronic infectious skin disease with sores, scab, whit shining spots beneath the skin. I have looked at some picture of people with leprosy.....not really to put them up on the screen because they are horrific. Here is what it says in the book of Leviticus.

**Leviticus 13:45-46 English Standard Version (ESV) <sup>45</sup> "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' <sup>46</sup> He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.**

In Leviticus chapter 14 it tells how a priest must declare a leper clean and what offerings he must provide as a way of giving thanks.

So as Lynn read this leper had an advanced case. How long I wonder was he isolated. Isolated meant he couldn't go to the synagogue (worship) he couldn't even be around his family.

He was Unclean! And anybody who associated with him or especially touched him would also be considered unclean.

In Medieval Times a priest would often read a burial service over a leper before he was sent out of the city. In the eyes of society and culture they were dead.

Notice that Jesus reached out and touched him. He took the risk. He did what was socially and religiously incorrect. A bit of a rebel this Jesus was. He reached out and touched someone.....and he said, "Be healed!" And instantly he was healed.

Jesus then tells the man to go to the priest, just as it says in Levitical Law as mentioned in Leviticus 14, and to show himself to the priest. He didn't want him to tell anyone because Jesus was trying to have some boundaries it was not quite time to publically make the full revelation that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God. Ah, but despite Jesus' instructions the report of his power spread even faster.....and many came to hear him preach and be healed of their diseases.

Jesus Sighting right there with an outcast. But I thought He was a rabbi, what is He doing with an outcast. Jesus was continually accused of eating and drinking with friends of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34), and even prostitutes and those caught in adultery.

Jesus puts it another way in the Good News of Matthew. Jesus is telling a parable and says this:

**Matthew 25:41-46 Contemporary English Version (CEV)**

**<sup>41</sup> Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup> I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me."**

**<sup>44</sup> Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?"**

**<sup>45</sup> The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me."**

**<sup>46</sup> Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."**

Ah, reaching out to the hungry, thirsty, stranger, those without clothes, those in jail. If you failed to do it to these, then Jesus says, you failed to do it to Him.

Who are the lepers and outcasts today? Should we be reaching out to them.

I found an article from Catholic Exchange, February 16, 2006 (so it is a bit dated), but the article is entitled, “Who Are Leper’s Today?” It was written by priest Roger Landry from the Fall River Diocese of Massachusetts. He says this:

“what Christ is calling us to do is to love the outcasts with the same love that He does, the love which would make Him go to the Cross again for them if He needed to. The following are some of the outcasts we may be called to love with Christ's love:

- The bodily leper: those with AIDS, those whom the world considers ugly or unattractive, or those whose illnesses are so long-lasting that few want to care for them;
- The psychological lepers: those with mental illness or mental disabilities, about whom others make jokes, but for whom they make no time;
- The spiritual or moral lepers: pedophiles, drug addicts, prostitutes, transvestites, death-row inmates — those who have committed very public and embarrassing sins, and those who think that their sins cannot be forgiven;
- The economic lepers: the homeless or the very poor, who are shut off from society and the things most of the rest of society take for granted;
- The racial lepers: depending upon where one lives those of a particular skin color, be it black, or brown, or yellow;
- The emotional lepers: those who, because of their own psyche or others’ actions, feel completely alone and abandoned.

These are among the ones Jesus wants us to reach out to and heal through our very human touch, to bring back from the margins into communion.”

Are we willing to reach out? Is what is breaking God’s heart also breaking ours?

Listen to this clip of a song by Casting Crowns called, **“Jesus Friend of Sinners.” (video)**

In my own way I was that lost cause. Jesus reached out to me and created a clean heart within me. I am not longer isolated...but I can say... “I’m Clean! I’m Clean!” I was a grateful outcast at His feet.

So how do today among us have a Jesus Sighing with an outcast. Hear not the following story:

There’s an old story about a very full church. People were literally dressed in what was called their ‘Sunday best.’ They were decked out. They were lookin’ fine. The children were, of course, always well-behaved, and the minister preached for exactly enough time that church began at 11:00, and got out at 12:00 on the dot, every single Sunday.

One morning, in that church, it was Easter Sunday. And Easter was, of course, extra full. Just as the ushers were about to close the doors, a young man walked in. This young man was dirty – you could tell that, whenever he last bathed, it hadn't been in the last week. His clothes were ripped, and it was pretty obvious that he'd been sleeping on the street.

He came into the church and tried to get a seat in the back, but, as we all know, churches always fill from the back, so there were no seats there. He started wandering up toward the front, trying to get a seat. He moved, row after row through this large church, looking for a spot, but every seat was taken. Finally, he got up to the front, and even the front pews were full. Here was this fairly obviously homeless young man, standing at the front of the church, just as the service was about to start. So, not knowing what else to do, he simply sat down on the floor in front of the first pew.

The head usher was a man in his 80s. He himself could barely walk, but was extremely dedicated to being the head usher. He had been watching this young man's progress from the back of the church. This usher was known as the most prim-and-proper of all the ushers at this church. He was the type who took his ushering very very seriously.

This dear 80 year old Head Usher decided he must do something and intervene. He approached the young man sitting on the floor, the people of the church began to cringe. There was going to be an ugly confrontation, right at the front of the church, right before the service, when this usher asked the young man to leave. Everyone, the pastor included, sat in stone silence as they awaited the confrontation. The head usher bent down and said something into the ear of this stranger. They strained their ears to hear what the usher was saying as he whispered in the ears of the young man. Next thing you know people saw the young man begin to scoot over a bit.

And then this prim and proper usher, this older man, who could barely walk, knelt down, crossed his legs, and sat down next to the young homeless man.

The congregation did not fully understand what they had witnessed. The pastor openly cried. "Friends," said the pastor, "I don't know if you need a sermon today, because you have just witnessed the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Inside these walls there are no outcasts. Inside these walls we need to know Christ and make Him known.

But what about outside these walls? But what about outside these walls? Are we ready to Pray, Invite, and Bring....even the outcasts to be included in the grace and love of Jesus.

Let's thrive to make Him known. Amen? I said let's thrive to make Him known? To those around us, to those by us. Let's reach out and touch someone. Are you ready, really ready to make Him known. Huh, huh, huh.

Then we will thrive. Let's thrive!!!!!!