

I don't have to tell you that (in life) “**externals**” matter --- those things that are **visible on the outside**. The simplest examples can be found all over the place. Just take a look at the products in a grocery store for example. Every package is screaming to get the attention of the consumer, trying to **stand out** among all the other foodstuffs on the shelf. And book publishers almost never let authors design their own covers. Rather, they work tirelessly to come up with just the right graphics, colors, and text --- hoping to **entice the reader** into stopping, picking up the book, and thumbing through it. People selling their houses have to make sure their homes are **spotless and magazine-worthy**, in some cases “staging” the home with items they don't even own themselves. And employers look closely at how an interviewee is **dressed**, even if they are applying for a job in which they are going to be working outside in jeans and a t-shirt. And of course, the **pretty people of this world** get the largest selection when it comes to choosing a mate.

Yes, externals do matter. And yet, this is the relatively small stuff. These are somewhat trivial examples, and don't really matter that much in the big picture. But what about the person suffering a debilitating **illness** who can't do the little day-to-day things we all take for granted? What about the person who doesn't know if he or she will be **able to pay their rent** this month? What about the person who is lonely, forgotten, and who **has no friends**? What about the person who isn't sure if his or her **marriage will survive**?

What about these things?

In a certain sense, these are the “externals” too, things that impact our physical bodies, or relationships, or life-circumstances. If you find yourself in any of these situations, you know well the **burdens** that come with these sorts of things. These are **heavy crosses**. Jesus knew that. We see his **love and compassion and healing power** on full display in today's Gospel Reading from Mark. A leper comes to him and begs to be healed. Jesus, moved with pity, stretches out his hand and heals the man. And then he tells him something somewhat puzzling,

“**See that you tell no one anything . . .**”

Talk about an unreasonable request! Of course, the man does exactly what many of us would do --- he immediately **tells everyone**. After all, this is a “miracle”, an unmistakable action of God in their midst.

This is big stuff --- life-changing stuff. And the former leper wants to make sure everyone knows about it. And the easiest “explanation” behind Jesus’ seemingly strange request is a very **practical** one.

Jesus knew that if word got out that he could heal leprosy (or any other disease) he would be inundated with people coming to him from everywhere. And this, of course, is exactly what happened. People raced to see him, especially those who **needed something specific from him**, needed their own “miracle”. Jesus even went off to a deserted place, but they found him anyway.

**But is that the whole story?** Is that the **only** reason Jesus told the man to keep quiet? We don’t know for sure. And yet, something tells me it was more than that.

My guess is that Jesus didn’t want his message, his promises to be reduced to simply **what he could do for people from the “outside”**, the “flashy” sorts of miracles that get all the attention. He wanted to make sure that people realized that the real “miracles” he wanted to “perform” were **on the “inside”**, miracles of the **heart, soul, and spirit**. **Not that he didn’t (or doesn’t) care about these other sorts of things.**

He does, absolutely, as evidenced by the **countless healings** depicted in Scripture and the countless unexplained healings across the world every day (maybe within our own families). He cares about our **financial well-being** and our **relationships** and all the **circumstances** of our lives. The hardest thing to do (when it comes to faith) is **continue to believe** even when the miracles don’t occur in the way that we want them to, or feel they need to.

I’d like to offer - a simple reason or explanation as to why God chooses to act as he does, **but, honestly, there isn’t one**. God understands our frustration and disappointment, and **even our anger**. Yet, he doesn’t want us to despair. He wants us to continue to **hope and believe**. And so, even if we don’t understand the mind of God (which we don’t), we can and even should **continue to plead for these things**, as long as we do so with a heart that says, “Your will God, not mine.”

And yet, for how important these things are, how **devastating they can be** for our day-to-day lives, they **don’t define who we are**, don’t get a say as to whether our lives have **value or meaning**, don’t even get a say in whether or not we are **touched by the loving hand of God**. The miracles **within each of us** are really what Jesus died to make possible.

The power of the resurrection allows the hardened heart to **soften**, the cruel heart to become **kind and compassionate**, the selfish heart to become **generous**, the vindictive heart to become **forgiving**, and the sinful heart to be **washed clean** --- enabling us to once again start down a different path, a journey **into the arms of our loving God for all eternity**.

I don't know about you, but if all of that happened within me --- **THAT** would be a **miracle!** So let's let God - **do precisely that** --- not just today, - but every moment of our lives.

**Oh, one more thing**

- it's ok --- God gives us **permission to tell everyone!**