

### Call to Worship

God has come again among us, moving in our midst, singing in our songs, speaking through the preaching.  
**Jesus will witness through the whispering of our elders, talk in the texting of our young people, and out of the mouths of babies who cry aloud in our worship.**

Let us be taught by the Holy Spirit's wisdom.

**Let us know that God lives among us as we worship this day.**

### Prayer of Invocation

Praise God! Let the world know that there has been a prophet among us.

Jesus of Nazareth, foretold in the word, rejected by the world, and raised in glory, lives among

**us. In a world full of options, we are thankful for the mission Jesus extends: to generously share cups of cold water in his name, serving those thought of as least and lost. Teach us your wisdom. Live among us as we worship you this day. Amen.**

### The Word

Mark 1:40-45 Common English Bible

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

**After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."**

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

### Living the Word

"Weighing the Consequences"

Mark 1:40-45

The scripture today, tells of a healing that Jesus performed. We are just in the first chapter of the book of Mark, and this is already the third healing story. The first healing was of a spiritual healing for one possessed by an evil spirit, and took place in the synagogue; the second healing was for Simon's mother-in-law, who was suffering from a fever, and took place in a private home; this one, the third, is for a man with Leprosy and could only have happen outside the city walls.

Let's review what we know about this Leper: He would have been desperate because of this disease. Today we know how to control and treat this bacterial disease and most of us don't really hear much about the fact that it still exists. Even so, in his day it was the disease with the most terror and pity from others. It is a skin disease which forms nodules that decay and deformed a person's physical body, and it is highly contagious.

In ancient times, no one knew how to keep from spreading it. Lepers were rendered 'unclean' and banished from any form of fellowship with others. In most towns they were sent outside the city walls to live by the sewer/dump site.

Because he was now a source of danger and contamination to his family, he would live alone. They were not allowed to touch anyone and if any came near they were required to shout 'unclean, unclean' so all knew they had the dreaded disease.

It is difficult to imagine the mental anguish as well as the physical anguish of Leprosy. This man, this leper, had some courage, though. He had heard of a miracle healer coming his way. He doesn't really understand who Jesus is, yet seeks out Jesus as he makes his way to the next town. He has enough faith to believe that he could be healed or he wouldn't have taken the chance.

He knew he was at the mercy of this healer, and gave the choice up to Jesus. Jesus reached out and touched him and he was made clean again. Jesus instructs him to go to the priests, for the procedure of acceptance back into society. If cured he had to be examined by a priest, bringing two bird offerings for sacrifice. He had to be washed, shaved and in clean clothes.

After seven days he was reexamined. This time he had to offer two male lambs and one female lamb, without blemish. If he passed this final exam, he would be given a 'clean' certificate. This seems like a lot, but remember the whole society knew what a danger he was to them when he was diseased, they would need proof, just as the priests did.

The man, no longer an 'unclean' leper, was elated and couldn't keep it to himself. Though Jesus 'sternly warned him' not to tell, he couldn't help himself, for his joy in going from an outsider of no worth to a whole person welcomed back into the fellowship of society was too much. He was elated for the healing. He couldn't just be thankful, he was compelled to tell all who would listen.

When he had weighed the consequences, he found that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain by taking this chance. He was breaking the law by approaching the healer, but what more could they do to him? This man couldn't see the big picture of Jesus' warning. He didn't understand what this would do to Jesus' ministry for the future.

How did Jesus relate to the Leper? Jesus already knew the stir that was beginning by the public healings he was doing. Jesus knew the consequences of actually touching a Leper, then you also became 'unclean'. Jesus knew what this would mean for him and his ministry but he was moved to compassion.

Just as the Leper could not stop himself from telling, Jesus could not stop himself from healing this pitiful man. Jesus knew he would be setting a huge example as he was the only one not to push this diseased man away. He had the power to heal. His power was from God. Yet Jesus also had the wisdom to advise the man to go and do what the law required of him: see the priest and make the sacrifices required.

Jesus also had the wisdom to see ahead to the consequences of these actions. So he 'sternly warned' the man not to tell. Obviously the warning wasn't stern enough to get through to the now healed and clean man. Jesus didn't say to him don't tell or else...or else the leprosy will come back, or else you will be struck dead (he could have done that), or else my ministry will be cut short. He just moves his ministry into the country.

Weighing the Consequences: Why would Jesus risk his own health and ensure himself ritually unclean by touching the Leper? Jesus now would be considered unclean by the temple priests. Did he give the warning trying to make the best of a bad deal for himself by cutting his losses? I have touched you, but please don't hinder my ministry by telling?

Now Jesus was not able to enter city. As I have read I have noticed that Jesus never went seeking people to heal, but he was willing to give of himself to the extreme, to heal others. All who witnessed this act of healing, knew he had touched the leper and was officially unclean. I wonder if the disciples were a bit shy of him for a few days...Unclean or not, people kept coming to him.

Jesus must have seen the reactions of the priests in the synagogue with the first healing. He must have known they wouldn't let him continue to do things, like healings 'in his own way,' it disrupted their work and order. The work and order that they had given to the people through all of the laws they had established. Jesus knew his time was short.

Over and over again in the book of Mark the word immediate and immediately appears. There is an urgency to Jesus' ministry as Mark records it. Many times in the book of Mark when Jesus asks those who see the miracles to keep them to themselves, the people don't. It is as if they can't contain it – it is too big.

Until the end of the gospels when Jesus commissions the disciples to go and share the good news; faced with his death and resurrection, they huddle in a room, afraid for what is to come next. Again, he comes to them and reminds them of all that they have witnessed and tells them to go and share the good news of God.

Of his short three years of time leading the people, Jesus spent most of his ministry with the people around him - teaching them, especially the disciples what they would do after he was gone. In Matthew 10:8 he commands the disciples to heal the sick and cleanse the Leper, just as they have seen him do.

This Leper was so human, as are we. We often have to get to the lowest point in our lives before we turn to God for help. God is always there and ready to touch our lives. If Jesus would risk himself to reach out and touch one who was considered so 'unclean' isn't there hope for us? Jesus doesn't come to us, but is waiting for us to be as brave as the Leper and come to Jesus. Are we not desperate enough?

We also are 'like to burst' when we have news of an engagement or birth within the circle of the people we love. We want to be the first to tell. But on certain occasions, it is not ours to tell, or ours to share and we need to weigh the consequences of speaking too soon.

What about Jesus consequences? Like in life, timing is everything. *On Monday, September 12, 2011*, bystanders in Utah became heroes after they lifted a burning BMW car off an unconscious motorcyclist trapped beneath it. Authorities say the accident Monday near the Utah State University campus in Logan happened when 21-year-old motorcyclist Brandon Wright collided with a car pulling out from a parking lot. The bike and car burst into flames and Wright was trapped underneath. A camera nearby captured a group of students and construction workers gathering together to tilt the car up and pull the young man to safety before emergency crews arrived.

"I have no idea where our power came from." Abbass Al Sharif is a graduate student at Utah State University. He says looking back, he still doesn't understand where the power came from to move the car off of fellow student Brandon Wright, or the powerful impact the story had on others. He goes on to say, "After the accident happened, you know, after we helped lifting the car, I went back to my research, thinking that's it, because this is normal."

But then the phone started to ring. ABC Network News, CNN, and the Ellen DeGeneres Show all wanted to "talk". Abbass Al Sharif was shocked. "Fifteen minutes of fame turned out to be one week of fame." He says with a laugh.

Tom Timken is the owner of a produce stand in the heart of Logan. He says he wasn't the first on the scene of the accident, but was one of the first to consider Brandon Wright might be alive. "There were a lot of people but they weren't too interested because they thought he was dead, and that's what they told me. So I thought I'd go look at him. He wasn't dead. He was trying to breathe."

Timken says because of the flames, they had no time, and began to lift. He didn't feel his actions merited media attention. "It's kind of interesting because I thought this was a local story you know. I was kind of shocked when I saw it went international." Tom passed on a chance to meet Ellen DeGeneres, 5 days later, and the cruise she gave to the others. He says it's tough to get away right now. "We're busy; corn, tomatoes, and peaches you know." Timken says he was happy to help, and is happy selling fresh fruit and vegetables at the Local Produce Company. "Fame and fortune never did anyone any good."

Abbass Al Sharif says he is also relieved to return to his research, but as he looks back, he likes the lesson learned from the accident. "The people who lifted the car, they were American people, and also people from around the world. The unity that we all had, to lift this car, to save this person, just because he is a human being, we are human beings, and I guess I like this attitude. I would love the politicians around the world to think in the same way because this would bring more peace."

Abbas Al Sharif is one of three international students who helped save Wright's life. He is from Lebanon; another is from Uzbekistan, the other, from Ghana. They all had one year to use their cruises from Ellen, but may not have been able to, because of visa issues. Brandon Wright hoped that he would be able to meet those who saved his life, some day.

Timing is everything, and sometimes what needs to be done can't take too much thought, but must be done right now. The people who came together in an instant and used God's power of healing to save Brandon Wright from certain death, didn't do it to win a cruise trip, or to make international news. But God can use their story to remind us that weighing the consequences have to be done... ahead of time.

Each of those who helped did so on a moment's notice, because they knew it was possible and they weren't afraid of what the consequences might bring for themselves, yet what the consequences would surely be for Brandon Wright without them.

So Jesus' ministry went to the countryside villages instead of returning to the big towns. What might that mean for us? We know now that Jesus did enough teaching and healing to convince enough people to tell the stories when it was time, but for this day Jesus' decisions changed the direction and shape of the rest of his ministry.

John Wesley's ministry was to reach those who couldn't or wouldn't go into the nice proper cathedrals for worship. Wesley instead, following his friend, George Whitefield's advice, brought the ministry to where the people were: at the mine entrances as the men came out from their work, he stood on the mine tailing and preached; he visited those in prison and those in the hospitals. Wesley preached at thousands of outdoor services, traveling a quarter of a million miles on horseback to the communities of England.

Timing and weighing the consequences. There is a time not to tell. That was the instructions Jesus gave to the now-clean man, as well as others in Mark's gospel: It is the so called "Messianic Secret" The longer Jesus could convince the people around him of God's love through his words and actions, the more of them who would be ready to tell when the right time came.

When he was well into his ministry he asked his closest, the disciples *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*<sup>44</sup> *And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*<sup>45</sup> *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*<sup>46</sup> *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

<sup>17</sup>*And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."*<sup>18</sup> *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*<sup>19</sup> *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*<sup>20</sup> *Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. (Matthew chapter 16)*

While Jesus was alive, in ministry, keeping it quiet may have given him more time to heal by his hand. Three years was all he had, but he prepared his followers to carry on his ministry with the preaching and healing. And then came a time to tell! The Gospels weren't written until 70AD about 35 years after all of these events had happened, but by then the good word of Christ's miracles was beginning to spread into Asia and Europe.

The disciples and followers of Jesus could and would now share the good news – the things they had witnessed, the ways they had been healed. They knew well where the healing comes from, **God**, the healer and they were giving God all of the credit. These words of hope have traveled all the way around the earth in the almost 2000 years since.

We have good news to share; promises of hope, through these stories and through our own stories. Now is the time to share them - to encourage and heal others.

We have not been told by Christ to keep our stories to ourselves. Some of our hymns attest to the compelling force to share God's good news: "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing My Great Redeemer's Praise" Now there is a visual – a thousand tongues – really?

Another has these words: My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation. (songs above the cries of the earth) I hear the real, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation. (something even better is ahead) The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing; (a better visual than a thousand tongues) All things are mine since I am his, How can I keep from singing? (when I sing this I know that I am healed.)

There are many more. "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, how great Thou art" "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!" "It is Well With My Soul" "I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory!" The writers knew God's healing power in their lives and were compelled to use their gifts of music to tell the world through verse. Now that is some really good news!

Go tell it on the mountain for this good news can bring us closer to Christ and send us out healed to tell others our story. In the season of Lent, just a few weeks ahead take the opportunity to share your healing stories with others. Through them, with God's help, we can heal others – a good consequence. Yet if these stories go untold, the story of Christ may not continue...and that would be a horrible consequence.

I invite you this week to process your story, even rehearse it so when the moment comes for you to share, you will be prepared to share. It is time for us to tell.