

St Michael's Lichfield : Easter Studies
Wednesday May 5th 2021

To respond to human need by loving service

Some Bible passages to read and questions to consider:

Mark 1:40-45 (NIV) (This will be the main focus of our study)

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

40 A man with leprosy^[h] came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

41 Jesus was indignant.^[i] He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

[h] – sometimes 'leprosy' in the Bible refers to a wide range of skin diseases which includes the illness we now know as leprosy

[i] 'indignant' here is translated 'filled with compassion'

Some questions to think about

1. How might Jesus and this man have come to meet, given the restrictions which Leviticus 13:45,46 points out?
2. Why might the man with the skin disease have asked/begged Jesus with the words 'If you are willing'?
3. Why might Jesus have been 'indignant' or 'filled with compassion' ?
Or could it be that Jesus' emotions have been both of these things?
4. What is the significance of Jesus touching the man before healing him?
5. What might Mark want to tell us through this healing encounter about Jesus' mission?
It is worth noting that Mark records it as an early encounter in Jesus' ministry.

Other passages which may be helpful to refer to...

Leviticus 13 and 14 especially Lev 13:45,46

1 Timothy 6:17-19

James 1:27 , 2:15-17, 5:1-6

Responding with loving service

On our best days, responding with loving service, is what we hope we will do when we come across people in need.

But often things get complicated for all sort of reasons

So in a study today we will take a look at an instance of Jesus meeting with a person in need and see what we might learn about the approach we can take.

Mark 1:40-45

1. We should not underestimate the importance of the fact that Jesus and the man meet at all. The man would have been prohibited from being around 'normal' society... and so we must presume that Jesus was in the man's neighbourhood.

In fact this should not surprise us... Have you noticed how many times in the gospels, Jesus comes across people who are on the edges of mainstream society, lepers, sinners, those mourning, Samaritans, region of the Gerasenes. You do not just 'come across' someone with leprosy in NT times. This tells us that Jesus was in the habit of going to the places where the people in need were likely to be.

This is a challenge for us. Often we choose, perhaps subliminally, to go to places where we know we will not be disturbed, where there will be no ethical or social demands upon us. Jesus seems to do the opposite.. He goes looking and is amongst those in need.

Shane Claiborne... 'It is not the Christians do not care about the poor, it's that they don't know anyone who is poor'

How might we address this?

What are the risks of seeking out those in need?

What are the risks and consequences of not doing so?

2. The man seems to question whether Jesus is willing to help, rather than if he is able to. Why might the man have wondered about whether Jesus cared enough to help him? Might it be that other teachers had not cared? Or that they may have thought his condition was his own fault in some way, or that it was a consequence of the way he had lived his life.

How often, when we see someone in need, do we find ourselves justifying our lack of response because of what we perceive about the situation of the person before us?

There is a right need to look at causes of need (we will look at this later) but the immediate response called for is one of compassion...and it seems this had been lacking in the responses that the man had had up to now.

3. Jesus touches the man – it may be that the man may not have been able to feel the touch which Jesus gives him. But the social isolation of not having anyone approach you must have been massive. Maybe Jesus knew this, and knew that the man's need was not just to be well but also to be accepted and included - to be treated as a fellow human, not a disease or a social problem

4. Jesus heals the man, and reassures him that he is 'willing'. Jesus heals him is of course vital – the man can now (once certified as 'clean') re-join his family and normal life – but it is also important that he matters to Jesus... that Jesus is not just healing him to remove the social problem which he represents. It may be tempting for us sometimes to give a donation or 'help' someone, so that they are no longer a problem to us and our conscience, rather than genuinely helping them out of compassion.

5. Jesus tells him to go to the priest, and offer the sacrifices for his cleansing – this is important because the certificate of cleansing issued by the priest was the means by which the man would be able to rejoin society. Jesus sees the whole person, heals the man, and also restores him into the social setting which will enable him to live and thrive without being questioned.

a couple of quotes...

Jim Wallis

'After a while, when you keep pulling people out of the river, you end up asking who is throwing them in upstream'

Dom Held Camara,

'When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no bread, they call me a communist'

John Stott quote...

I was hungry and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger.

I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your church and prayed for my release.

I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.

I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health.

I was homeless and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.

I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me.

You seem so holy, so close to God,

but I am still very hungry – and lonely – and cold.

Quoted in New Issues facing Christians Today - John Stott

Have a think about how you feel about your response to people who you know who are poor or who are in need.

Do many people in your church, in your neighbourhood know the names of people who are genuinely poor or in need? Is this ok? And if it is not, how might this change

What can we do when we feel threatened by the circumstances of someone who is in need?

What can we do when we do not feel compassion for a person who is in genuine need?

Is it possible to practice 'compassionate responses' so that we are better able to give a good response

when a genuinely needy person comes into our lives.

What is a good prayer to pray?

Isaiah 61:1-2 – a good vision for a church which wants to be a servant for God...

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,^[a]
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.

Blessing of discomfort...

*May God bless you with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
So that you may live deep within your heart.
May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.
May God bless you with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
And turn their pain into joy.
And may God bless you with enough foolishness
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.
Amen”*