

Compassionate Community

February 15 • 2009

Focus Scripture

Mark 1:40–45

Additional Scriptures

2 Kings 5:1–14

Psalms 30

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

O God, our only hope, thank you for choosing to touch our lives with wholeness and restoration.

This day and all days, strengthen our resolve to make choices that witness to others of your amazing healing power.

Amen.

Consider for a moment the faith and trust required to risk crying out to God for healing for ourselves or for others. Joining the one with leprosy, the bold servant, the obedient commander, the psalmist, and the apostle, we proclaim – along with Jesus – that God desires to act on behalf of wholeness in human lives.

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:40–45

The action-packed first chapter of Mark's gospel closes with another witness to Jesus' authority to teach and to heal. A third of Mark is made up of stories of miracles, including today's story about Jesus healing one with leprosy. In Mark, these miracle stories are symbols of the power of God that lives in Jesus.

Today's story points to Jesus' God-given authority and power in a way that modern readers might not recognize, but would have been understood by Mark's first readers. In that time, it was believed that only God could heal at will, so the phrase "if you choose" – "if you will" – identifies Jesus with God's power. That Jesus does choose to touch this one with leprosy in order to heal him points to the compassion at the heart of this authority.

The term *leprosy* in biblical texts likely refers to a number of skin diseases, and not Hansen's disease, which is sometimes called "leprosy" in modern times. In Jesus' day, people with skin diseases were cut off from the normal activities of the community. People believed it was hazardous to touch one with a skin disease. Those who suffered from such ailments were prevented from working, moving among the community, and engaging in religious activities. Whether such a disease was short-lived or lifelong, the effects usually were devastating. Healing from such a disease meant restoration to life within the community.

"Show yourself to the priest..." With these words, Jesus instructs the one healed to proceed according to God's law. As outlined in Leviticus 14, priests were able to affirm that a person was healed and able to resume life in the community. In a surprising turn of events, this newly healed person chooses, instead, to go out and proclaim what Jesus has done.

From this point, Jesus' ability to move about the countryside freely is hampered by the crowds who had received healing from him. In reporting this incident, Mark begins to identify reasons that the religious authorities oppose Jesus.

It is faith and trust in God's power that spurs some in the community to bring the Aramean commander, Naaman, to God's prophet for healing from leprosy. This story in **2 Kings 5:1–14** reveals that more is healed than Naaman's physical infirmity. Naaman learns that worldly power and wealth are not all that matter. Naaman and all those around him recognize God's amazing healing power.

Psalms 30 sings of trust in God's faithfulness. It is a psalm of thanksgiving for recovery from illness. In a few places the psalmist seems to suggest that God had caused the illness by becoming angry (v. 5) or withdrawing (v. 7). Note that neither of the healing stories for today suggests illness as divine punishment.

In **1 Corinthians 9:24–27**, Paul encourages early Christians, and us, to tell freely the good news of Christ. Paul's metaphor of the athlete's endurance and focus gives the faithful in Corinth an image of the commitment they are called to bring to this task.

• • • • •

With confidence in God's power and faithfulness, we are free to ask for the healing we need. In doing so we may be surprised that, through Jesus' touch, we receive so much more than we ask. When have you felt God's healing presence most keenly? What risks will you and your church take to participate in God's healing power and proclaim God's healing love? In what way might your church be a healing and restoring presence in people's lives?

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

