

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
February 14-15, 2009
Mark 1:40-45

“The Healing Touch”

This weekend as our congregation gathers in proceeds from the Multiplication Plan in support of Mission India, I thought it appropriate for all of us to hear the story of someone who has been on the receiving end of this project. As you know, the funds we are collecting will go toward Mission India’s Children’s Bible Clubs, and so I want to share with you the story of Raysumi, a young girl in northeast India who has been blessed immeasurably through the ministry of the Children’s Bible Clubs. (*Show DVD from Mission India on Raysumi’s story*)

Some of you may recall that about a year ago at this time, we first heard about Raysumi, together with other people who have come to know Jesus’ love through Mission India. Raysumi has experienced the healing touch of Jesus through the Children’s Bible Clubs. It is that healing touch of Jesus in today’s Gospel lesson that I would focus on briefly this day.

A leper comes to Jesus asking to be made clean. We probably read this like it’s very ho-hum; no big deal. But it becomes a very big deal in the exchange that follows: **“... 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...”** (Mark 1:41). That touch shattered all the laws of ritual purity within Judaism which called for lepers to keep away from people and live in separate communities – what we would call leper colonies (see Leviticus 13-14). And touching that leper who is unclean would thereby make the person who touched him unclean. Do you see how huge this is? Jesus broke through all of this, and *touched* that unclean leper, whose name we don’t even know, and said, **“I do choose. Be made clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean”** (Mark 1:41-42). The rabbis affirmed that it was as difficult to heal the leper as it was to raise the dead, but Jesus’ healing touch restores life and health.

When the leper comes before Jesus with his request, the translation reads that Jesus was **“moved with pity”** (Mark 1:41). In some of the ancient manuscripts, that word “pity” isn’t used, but the word for indignation is. Why would Jesus be filled with indignation? Pity or compassion sounds so much kinder and gentler, but I vote for indignation and here’s why: Jesus is moved with indignation – a righteous indignation, a holy anger, at the ravages of sin, disease, and death which take their toll upon people who are created in God’s own image. That leper kneeling in front of Jesus is an everyman for us all. Jesus is filled with a holy anger at how broken the crowning glory of God’s creation is. His healing touch, then and now, brings forgiveness, hope, and joy. Jesus’ healing of this leper shows how powerful and surpassing the salvation is that he brings. The law of Moses provided for the ritual purification of a leper, but it was powerless to actually heal the person of the disease. That healing touch comes only through Jesus.

For Raysumi, the Savior’s healing touch has come through the Children’s Bible Clubs, through the teachers who shine with the Savior’s healing love. In a very real way, the Savior’s healing touch has come upon Raysumi just as surely as it did upon that leper. That healing touch of Jesus comes to us as well who are broken and sick with the devastating effects of sin in our own lives. Jesus, who chose to make the leper clean, has chosen to make us clean. He has taken our uncleanness, our impurity, our sickness on himself, and gives us his own life. And in that life, we too experience Jesus’ healing touch. And receiving this gift of new life, we become instruments of Jesus’ healing touch – his hands, his feet, his mouth. May God help us to do this for Jesus’ sake. Amen.