

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mark 1:40 – 45

One of my favorite shows is called the Walking Dead. It's an intense show about Zombies taking over the world. There are no zombies in the bible. But lepers would come rather close to creating the fear that we associate with the walking dead.

Leprosy was a terrible disease that gradually ate away at the body. The people of Jesus' time did not understand the disease, but they knew it could spread. So, they quarantined lepers.

All you have to do is think of the recent events regarding the Flu crisis to gain some sense of the concern and panic that leprosy caused in the ancient world.

So, if somebody with a dreaded and contagious skin disease would come up to you and want to shake your hand, what would you do? All of us would pull back and say, "No, stay away.

There's no sense that both of us become infected." We would keep the leper away. Jesus does not. In today's gospel when he sees the leper he is moved to compassion.

He stretches out his hand and touches him. Why would Jesus do this? He is not inviting us to set aside medical hygiene and go around touching infected people.

Jesus touches the leper to show us what God does. Jesus reveals in this action that our God is willing to push past any barrier to touch and to save the infected, the ostracized, and the doomed.

Now this is good news for us because we are the leper. "Now wait a minute," you say, "I'm not a leper. I'm healthy. I have family and friends around me. My life is good and successful."

And, if that's the case, then this gospel is not your gospel—or this gospel is not your gospel today. But this is the gospel to remember if your life takes a downward turn.

If your health fails, and you have to deal with sickness that limits your mobility or threatens your survival, this gospel tells you that God will not forget you and that even in your sickness God desires to touch you.

When your relationships fall apart, when your marriage fails, your family splits, or people you trust turn away, this gospel tells you that God is still in your corner and that God still desires to save you.

When we mess things up because of greed or selfishness or pride or weakness, it is easy for us to feel that we no longer have value. We feel that we are unclean, that we no longer deserve to be loved.

This gospel tells us that our sin and our failure are no barrier to God. We are not contagious to Jesus. He still has the power to make us whole.

So, on days that we are healthy and happy, we should give thanks and praise God. But on the days when we are the leper, this gospel is our hope.

Although we may see ourselves as the walking dead, God still sees us as beloved daughters and sons. And, if we call out, we will feel God's touch, and hear "I do will it. Be made clean."

AMEN.