

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**23 February, 2025 - Peregrin**  
**Luke 5:12-26**  
**Contentious Jesus - Forgiving**  
**Rev'd Lynda Johnson**

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Today, Jesus is again very busy. He encounters loads of people, but we are specifically told about two - firstly, a man who begged with his face to the ground, for Jesus to heal him. "If you are willing, you can make me clean" he says. and secondly, a paralysed man, whose friends bring him to Jesus in a very unconventional way.

So let's look at this first man.

The reason he was so desperate, begging from the ground, was because he had leprosy.

I would imagine that most average people these days wouldn't think about leprosy, because that's an ancient disease and just not a 'thing' anymore, but leprosy is still a disease that affects people today.

It's caused by bacteria and is contracted when a person who's affected coughs or sneezes, and a vulnerable person breathes in those droplets.

Now it's true that leprosy rarely affects people in western countries of our, although there are reported cases in Australia. But it's certainly deeply entrenched in history. It's been uncovered in skeletons over 4000 yrs old, and recorded in ancient texts, just like we read today.

A Norwegian doctor, Gerard Hansen discovered the bacteria responsible back in 1873, and that's why in medical circles today, leprosy is actually called Hansen's disease. A second bacteria that causes leprosy was found in 2008, not so long ago really. It's incredible that it took close to 140 years for further research to find something.

The wonderful thing that we now know is that leprosy is curable through antibiotics.

Still today, across our world, someone is diagnosed with leprosy every 2 minutes. 60% of cases are in India, and early diagnosis and treatment can help avoid permanent disability.

### ***Slide Gallery***

Back in 2014 Chris and I and some others from our church at North Pine had the privilege of going to Nepal on a mission trip to see our CMS link missionaries, and we visited the Green Pastures hospital in Pokhara. This has been one of the largest leprosy hospitals in Nepal since 1957, and it still treats leprosy and so much more.

It's really interesting to see their physiotherapy and prosthetics departments. They make their own prosthetics, and the ingenuity is amazing.

Here is a hand with a spoon attached to the fingers so that you can feed yourself rice and dahl quite easily. And when it's time to go out into the field and harvest the crop, you just swap out your spoon hand for your scythe hand. Amazing.

This is Shankar, an amazing man who came to GP hospital as a boy to be treated, he was healed, and he attributes his healing to Jesus, because it was while he was at the hospital that he was loved and treated by Christians and he came to know Jesus, and left his native Hinduism. He now runs a Christian home for children whose parents are sick, or some may be orphans, and others

need to leave their remote village for education. He and his wife care for multiple children in their home and we saw first hand, the blessing of being healed from leprosy. Shankar is a beautiful faithful Christian disciple.

Now often in scripture the word 'leprosy' in the Greek can be a general term for a skin condition, but if a person had been declared unclean, it would separate them from people and it would separate them from God.

People would have stayed away from him. He would have to announce himself with the words, "Unclean, unclean."

He couldn't go to the temple to worship God unless he was healed, and went through a process of examination and purification.

The rituals and rules around skin diseases were very detailed. And they were detailed not to be pedantic, but to be helpful.

Leviticus 13 and 14 are specifically about skin problems, with incredible detail. If you haven't read Leviticus for a while, check out chapters 13 & 14 when you go home, and it will give you an idea of the detail and particularity of concern about skin diseases.

Chapter 13 details the conditions and what the priest had to go through in order to *declare* someone unclean,

but .... helpfully .... chapter 14 is all about the cleansing from skin diseases.

It goes through all the rituals for how you cleanse yourself ceremonially after healing from each of these conditions.

And there were sacrifices to be done which were appropriate for wealthy people, and also for those who were poor.

Now this man trusted that Jesus could make him clean. And when he was clean, he'd be free to relate to people, and free to publicly worship his God again.

So what is it in these stories today that show Jesus being contentious.

Well, Jesus didn't just heal the man. He showed compassion and **touched** him first.

In touching this man Jesus made **himself** ceremonially unclean according to the regulations of the temple.

But Jesus knows that compassion is more important than rules.

That man may not have been touched for a very long time, but Jesus reached out to him, and touched him, so the man could feel the love of God.

And it is after that, that Jesus heals him.

I think that's an important principle for us to recognise as Christians, and to model that, for how we engage with our neighbours, our family, our friends and the community.

What a difference it makes for people to feel loved by us, before anything else.

Not that I'm advocating that we go around touching people - that might be a little weird, but we need to think about what is the real need of the person we're dealing with, and how can we show them love in a way that is particular, that is different, from those around us.

I have no doubt it would impact the effect of our mission, our evangelism and our invitation to others to investigate Christianity.

What is there that we can do in this world as Christians, that models what Jesus did that day?

Jesus didn't just fix a problem, he humanised a problem and loved the person.

And then once Jesus had healed the man he commands him not to tell anyone, but to go to a priest so he could be declared clean.

Leviticus 14 comes into play, do you see.

Going to the priest would restore the man because he would be declared clean and go through the cleansing rituals and sacrifices. Then he would be allowed to mix with people and worship in the temple or synagogue again.

Going to do that first, before anything else, would be a testimony to the religious leaders at the start of Jesus' ministry of what he had done for the man.

But Jesus didn't want to be known in the world as a miracle worker or healer - that could hinder the power and subtlety of his mission.

But to no avail, because news spread quickly. Crowds came to listen, crowds came to be healed.

Then we have one of the most beautiful verses in all the Gospels.

Did you notice it? v. 16 - But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Isn't Jesus' humanity a beautiful thing? Here it is amazingly juxtaposed with his divinity.

Busyness / withdrawal / busyness / withdrawal.

And then one day things get hectic again, and some men bring their sick friend to Jesus.

He's paralysed, lying on a stretcher so when they get to the house they find there's no way they'll ever get him to Jesus.

But like the heroes they are, the impossible isn't going to stop them. They manage to climb onto the roof, they remove the roof tiles, or clods of earth that cover the roof and they lower him down into the room in front of Jesus.

And what does Jesus see? First he sees beyond the man to the faith of his friends.

Let me ask you, what do you think faith is?

Is it simply believing?

Is it simply a conviction that something is true?

Or is it more than that?

The book of James says: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder." (James 2:19). So it must be more than simply believing.

When Jesus sees their faith, what is he seeing?

He sees some men lowering their friend through the ceiling.

He sees men who refused to be put off by a minor obstacle like the crowd standing in their way.

He sees men who were so convinced that Jesus could heal that they were prepared to risk the wrath of the owner of the house when they vandalised his roof.

Faith, you see, is a belief that leads you to try the unbelievable, the impossible, not because you're crazy, though some people might think that, but because you believe that God can do miracles.

But then Jesus sees something else.

He sees a man lying in front of him in great need. Well that's no big deal, that would be obvious to everyone. Lying there with muscles wasted away from lack of use. Everyone could see how needy he is.

But that's not the need that Jesus sees.  
Jesus sees his need for the gospel.

And that's why Jesus is here. This is the reason he's been wandering from village to village preaching the gospel.

Jesus sees that this man is a sinner - just like everyone else in that room.  
And just like every one of us in this room.

His great pressing need isn't to be healed.  
It's to receive the forgiveness of God;  
it's to experience the joy of knowing the grace of God,  
the acceptance of God.  
And so Jesus says to him "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Four powerful words - "Your sins are forgiven."

Do you come to God in repentance, ashamed at your repeated failures?  
Well, the message of the gospel is:  
"Your sins are forgiven."  
You've been reconciled to God through Jesus.

I hope that message warms your heart.  
Because not everyone is able to hear it like that.

Not even Jesus could give that message in a way that everyone received it.

You see, there's a group of pharisees and teachers sitting in on this.

They were well versed in what was right and what was wrong. And it was obvious that Jesus had gone too far this time!

Jesus is being a little bit contentious in their book, and they began to say to themselves - "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

No doubt they were there because they'd heard that this guy's teaching was remarkable - and they'd come to check just what it was that he was saying.  
And what they expected, is exactly what they got.

This is a man who goes too far.  
No-one can declare sins forgiven except God.

What a contentious Jesus we have!

But he knows what they're thinking. He can probably see it on their faces even if they're not saying it out loud.

So he turns to them and asks "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk!'"

A simple question with a simple answer.

The answer is staring them in the face isn't it?  
There's no way this man could ever get up and walk.

Even if Jesus fixed his nervous system, his muscles couldn't possibly support him without months of physiotherapy.

But Jesus isn't just a teacher.  
He isn't just a healer.  
He's the Son of God.  
The Pharisees have actually got it right. Only God can forgive sins.

And so Jesus then says to them: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' -- he says to the paralytic-- 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'"

And off he goes, mat and all.

Jesus' power is demonstrated in a way that no-one can question.  
They're all blown away by this demonstration of the power of God. They've never seen anything like it.

Yet when you think about it, the healing is really just the side show.  
It's Jesus being contentious that was the main act.  
The main act was Jesus' first words to the paralysed man. "Your sins are forgiven."

Jesus has come to proclaim forgiveness of sins to human beings who are unable to help themselves.

His healing of the paralysed man demonstrates that Jesus has the power of God to back up his words  
but it's the message of forgiveness that really matters.

Two men healed today - a leper, and a paralytic.

I think we need to remember that our sin does for us spiritually, what leprosy did for people physically.

Our sin separates us from God and from people.

My sin separates me from God and from people. And only Jesus can heal.

The leper, simply by being a leper, was separated from God and from people.

With the healing of the leper, he then had to go to the priest for cleansing, and then he was restored into relationship and fellowship with others. The Levitical rituals did for him what forgiveness did for the paralytic.

With the healing of the paralytic, Jesus forgives and then heals. And he got up and returned to normal life.

These two miracles together, show that Jesus came to fulfil the law.

Sin often cripples people, and forgiveness is all that is needed.

Forgiveness is the main game.

Jesus stretched out his arms of love to reach out to a human race that has gone its own way rather than God's way.

Just as Jesus touched the leper, he touches us by entering into humanity, and becoming human.

In the Bible healing and salvation are not divided in the way we divide them.

In the Bible a person cannot be properly healed unless their relationship with God has been healed. This does not mean that physical healing doesn't matter. Physical healing does matter.

Jesus heals the physical problem of the paralysed man. But just because we are physically healthy does not mean we don't need to be healed in so many other ways. In the Bible to be completely well we also need to be at peace with God.

And this is what Jesus came to do.

And he stretches out his arms of love on the cross to take the punishment for the sins of the world so that those who are united with him might be free.

Freed from separation from God and people.

Free to know God and follow His ways.

So, some things to think about -

Are we speaking in gospel ways in our every day situations?

Are we showing grace to people we come across day by day?

Are we engaged in the main game or just the side show?

There may be some here today who are only just beginning to think about these kinds of things.

Are you searching for something that you can't yet articulate?

Do you feel a discontent with life and you yearn for something solid and better.

Well can I say that asking those kinds of questions in a place like this, is a great thing. In this place you will find people who will listen, people who will love, and people who will help.

Don't stop asking your questions.

Jesus' offer of forgiveness is there for all of us, and it is the greatest thing ever.