

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
February 12, 2012**

**Mark 1:40-45**

**Look Closely and See... The Power of Prayer**

- 1. A lesson from the leper's prayer**
- 2. A lesson from Jesus' answer**

**Hymns: 446 – 87 – 409**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

**Mark 1:40-45 –**

<sup>40</sup> ***A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."***

<sup>41</sup> ***Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"*** <sup>42</sup> ***Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.***

<sup>43</sup> ***Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:*** <sup>44</sup> ***"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."***

<sup>45</sup> ***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.***

A woman sits at home at her dining room table. A checkbook lies open before her on his right; a stack of bills lies on her left. The two are not matching up well at all (to the negative). It does not appear they will be matching up next month either. She has prayed to God about this constantly since the time her husband left her and her two small children. Yet finances have not improved in the last six months. Is God listening? Will he answer?

An older man sits at home, quite distressed. His son, who is a young adult, is straying from the faith. His life is not exhibiting the faith that he professed on his Confirmation Day. He is making choices in all areas of his life that are shocking and surprising. The father does not understand. He has prayed to God about the problem again and again. He is getting discouraged in his prayers. Does God know? Does he care?

The same scenario applies to many situations of life: When sickness comes, when a young couple wants a child, when a young person wants to meet someone special to share their life with. If God is listening to our prayers, why doesn't he seem to answer? Or is he listening at all?

Today, we're continuing our sermon series called ***"Look Closely and See..."*** In our Scripture reading this morning, we see an example of prayer. In fact it is a great model for us to follow! We see the prayer that a leprous man brought Jesus long ago. It shows us the power of prayer. Today we'll focus on two aspects of this story as we ***"Look Closely and See... The Power of Prayer"***:

- 1. A lesson from the leper**
- 2. A lesson from our Savior Jesus**

We read in Mark 1: *“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ‘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.’ 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.”*

## **Background**

Many of you have probably heard about the disease called leprosy, which many in Jesus’ day were afflicted with. Leprosy is still found in our world today. Leprosy was a skin disease, an infection that would spread over a person’s body. The bodily condition of such a person was distressing. Leprosy was painful. Whitish blemishes and holes would develop that ate the skin away. This would spread until fingers and limbs would fall off in an advanced state of the illness.

Leprosy caused hideous results. It was difficult to see a person suffering with the illness. Leprosy was also contagious. And it was incurable at Jesus’ time.

Leprosy also caused social results at Jesus’ time. OT law stated in Leviticus 13: *“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as he has the*

*infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.”* You had to live outside of society. Therefore, lepers usually gathered in groups in uninhabited places. Food for them was dropped at prearranged spots. Rabbinic laws that developed throughout the OT put even stricter laws on life for lepers.

Leprosy also affected a person religiously. A person with leprosy was ceremonially unclean. He was excluded from worship. And, if a miracle cure occurred, had to go to be examined by the priest and go through rather involved steps to be accepted back into the religious community. Additionally, the illustration of SIN was used for leprosy. The decaying effects and the separation from God illustrated our sinful natural condition. At times people even accused a person with leprosy of having committed a specific sin that God was punishing them for.

A man with leprosy approached Jesus one day. The circumstances according to Matthew’s account are that Jesus had just finished the Sermon on the Mount in his early ministry, and he is headed for his headquarter city of Capernaum. His preaching has attracted many people and his is rising to the height of his popularity in his earthly ministry.

## **1. A lesson in the leper’s prayer**

What remarkable characteristics do we see in this leper’s prayer? I’d like to point out four words that describe his prayer:

1. **BOLD** – This man certainly came with boldness. He was breaking laws as he came to Jesus! However, his purpose was a

noble one. He was coming to the Savior for help.

not have granted this man's request!)

We also see his boldness in the way he came to Christ. He fell on his knees and we hear he "begged" Jesus to heal him. The Greek word implies urgent beseeching and exhorting.

**Do these four words characterize your prayer life?** After all, we said that this prayer would serve well as a model for us.

Are your prayers bold? Or are your prayers better characterized as being an afterthought? "Oh, this situation has finally gotten to the point where we should pray about this"? Do you succumb to the habit of your prayers being a last ditch effort? A good illustration of that might be the manual in your glove compartment for your vehicle. Do you pull that booklet out often or just in emergency situations? Do you do the same with prayer? Do you tell someone, "I will pray for you" and then forget?

Are your prayers patient? It's also interesting that a model prayer in the OT is Jacob wrestling with the Lord all night. Are your prayers wrestling matches? Or brief encounters like a quick e-mail you send out?

Are your prayers trusting? And are they submissive? There are times you do not need to pray to God, "If this be your will, Lord." When God has promised spiritual blessings that we know he wants to give – forgiveness from our sins, strengthening of our faith through his Word – we do not need to qualify our prayers. But in temporal matters, we may not know what the wisdom of God knows. Our submissive faith will need to pray as the leper did, "If it be your will" and leave the final answer up to the Lord.

**May we use this prayer as a model for our prayer life!**

2. **PATIENT** – This man, Luke's account tells us, was "covered" in leprosy. He had an advanced case. How long had this man been praying about this? Yet he comes again in prayer to the Lord on that day long ago.
3. **TRUSTING** – We see this man's faith in the simple words "*you can make me clean.*" No doubt is expressed there. This is remarkable, given the fact that we don't know that Jesus had healed a leper up to this point in his ministry! What trust this man had that Christ could do this!
4. **SUBMISSIVE** – This is expressed in the man's words: "*If you are willing.*" We see no demand here. The man is throwing himself on Jesus' mercy if the Lord wants to cure him. The man had a grasp that there was wisdom involved in the decision to cure him as well as power that was needed, and he submitted himself to the decision that the Lord would wisely make in his case. (Since we know the rest of the story in our text, we see that there was a reason Jesus might

## A lesson in Jesus' answer

One more lesson needs to be learned. Not only do we learn from the leper this morning, but also learn as we see what our Savior did in this situation. Our text says, *"Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man."*

We see quite plainly that Jesus had compassion. We see this in the Greek word for being "filled with compassion." It is SPLANCHNIDZOMAI, a long word that literally means that a person's guts or insides are moved deeply because of a situation – their kidneys, liver, etc. The closest English idiom we have is perhaps that Jesus' "heart was moved." This word is used a few times of Jesus in his ministry, such as when he saw a widow at Nain whose only son had died or when two blind men came after him at Jericho.

We also see the compassion of Jesus in the fact that he touched the man. Think about how remarkable that is! The fact that a healthy man would touch a leper would be headline news in Jesus' day. This automatically made a clean person unclean. Yet Jesus cannot help but touch the sick man. Do you show such compassion? Do you touch sick people or avoid that, even with your own children? Or, taking the illustration to the extreme, if you walked into an infirmary in a third world country where they had AIDS patients languishing, I wonder if you would have the compassion to touch them. Yet Jesus feels such compassion.

Another lesson that Jesus teaches us is that he certainly does have the power. *"'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured."* All

it takes is a word, actually two in the Greek. Jesus simply commands his healing and it is immediate. He is ready to go show himself to the priest to begin the steps of being allowed back into society.

**It is vital for us to know these two lessons for our prayer life. When you come to Jesus with your problems, he has compassion on you!** Is it really so? How can we be sure? Scripture certainly tells us this. A simple NT verse that I remember often is 1 Peter 5:7: *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* HE CARES FOR YOU. So throw it all on him!

A proof we see is that when we were sick with sin, Jesus had enough compassion to come to this world and take your sins on himself. He loved you enough to come willingly as your Savior to pay your debt of sin on the cross. Why would he do that? His love and pity for your wretched condition played a part.

**It is also vital for us know that when we come to Jesus with our problems he has the power to help as well.** Is there a problem at home? Is it with a marriage? It's common. Husband and wife seem incompatible. Arguments occur often. The situation seems to be deteriorating. A couple might say, "This situation is hopeless. The only solution here is to get a divorce because we can't work this out." Perhaps they feel they made a mistake in getting married and therefore should not continue. But in their heart they know that this is not the right remedy.

God alone can help. Call upon him. Open up to the counsel of his Word. Wrestle with him in prayer along with your spouse for God to heal your marriage. Many a

Christian couple has weathered the marital storms of life because they appealed to Christ for help and got it.

gracious will throughout our lives, while remembering the power of prayer. Amen.

Is the problem with a troubled friend? Are they losing their faith? Do you struggle with the words to say? Do you think the situation is hopeless? Pray earnestly that the Lord would provide them with the faith and strength they need for their times of doubt and trial. He has the power to help!

Is the problem with a behavior? Is an addiction the issue? Is excessive drinking in the picture? Is abuse involved? Willpower and good resolutions are helpful, but what power need the Christian never forget? Along with good counseling, cast it on the Lord. Wrestle with him in prayer. He has the power to help.

Is the problem a state of the mind? Grief? Depression? Medical treatment and solid counseling can help. But don't forget to bring it to the Lord in prayer. With the many problems and trials of life – too many to mention in this sermon – use not only the resources in this world that God has given you, but wrestle with him in prayer for his aid, **for he has compassion and power!**

In this Epiphany season, we have been learning how Jesus shows himself to be the One who has been sent from heaven, the Son of God himself, our Savior. Today we have focused on another account that has taught us just that. Jesus' encounter with a leper shows that he is the One who has the power and compassion to answer prayer.

As we learn from this model today, may we trust in him and pray to him often. Also, may our will always submit to his good and