

Title: "If...?"¹

Text: Mark 1:40-42²

Gideon's Sunday – Epiphany 6 – February 2, 2012

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***Note:** Please bear with the fact that there are several references in this message to video clips that were shown in the service.*

Text for today

A leper came to [Jesus], imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."⁴¹ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

"If"

On the surface, our text appears to be a very simple story. A man had contracted the dreaded disease called "leprosy," broke the Jewish law. The law said he could not come near anyone, unless they, too, were afflicted with leprosy. They believed leprosy was highly contagious, and contracted by skin-to-skin contact. Risking everything, he went where he was not allowed to go, he approached Jesus.

Imagine being in that crowd, as this man squeezed his way through, the dreaded leper, pushing you (and who knows how

¹ PR: CP 79:49

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many others) out of the way ... touching you (and others) along the way to Jesus.

Falling before Jesus the man spoke. Listen to his words, something strange is going on here. The word *“if”* would indicate doubt, and yet, the next words from his mouth, *“you will ...”* implies faith. Can faith and doubt co-exist? Indeed, even as sinner and saint co-exist, so do doubt and faith.

Go back to your position in that crowd. Touched by the leper, how are you feeling? You have been touched by this horribly disfigured, pale, dying man? Who are you worried about at this moment? You ... or the leper?

Action

Before you can start to scratch the imaginary itch on your arm, before you can look to the next person and complain about what this man did to you, Jesus says, *“I will.”* And then, in an instant, Jesus acts. Jesus reaches out His hand, not in repulsion, (as though to say, “Get away from me,”) but in love. Jesus is touching the untouchable, embracing the despised and rejected, reaching out to the unreachable.

And there is the greater miracle, I would think. He does that which (I doubt) any of us could or would do, considering the situation. Before we could even worry about what might be, might happen, might afflict you, Jesus touches the man. Jesus touches the one who caused the problem and with a simple declarative: *“I will,”* He touches and He does so much more. Instantly the man is restored and healed! A clean bill of health, instantly!

Faith

Oh, did you notice what Jesus did not do? It's often interesting to consider what the Savior does not do. Jesus does not scold the man for disobeying orders. Jesus understood and understands.

There is always more to the story than the physical. Physical health is precious, emotional health is even more important, spiritual health is irreplaceable. Jesus provides all three in the simple touch, and the straight-forward word.

Sometimes faith seems like an abstract concept. Sometimes we make issues of faith way more complex than they should be. Jesus takes the simple, faith-filled word, ***"If you will, I know you can make me clean,"*** and turns it into a life-lesson for all present.

Here is the problem. Usually, when we come to God, we preface our request with *"If you can..."* as though God might not be able to help. Whether the issue is serious physical illness, or the plague of guilt which often overcomes, we come with a "last-ditch" mentality.

How often don't we lack the faith to say, "If you will," which implies, "I know you can," and instead replace it with, "If you can" which implies, "I'm not sure you are there." Or we might say, "if you are there," which implies, "I'm not sure you can help." Our sinful nature, the world we live in, and the enemy of our soul, leads us to question NOT "If God will," but "If God is able" to help us. I am quite sure every one of us has faced moments when we have thought, "I'm not sure faith is

real,” and, “I’m not sure you are real, God.” Here is the truth: faith is not an abstraction.

I want you to watch a brief video clip, provided by the Gideon’s. Watch for two things. First, watch and see how Jack’s situation was filled with a despair like that of the leper. Then, listen to the way Jesus worked, in ways no one could expect, taking faith from an abstraction, to a concrete reality for this man.

The moment we listen to the Word, whether that is the Word brought to bear on our lives as infants, in Holy Baptism, or whether it is the Word we read or hear, the Holy Spirit establishes in us the connection ... the reality of faith.

Submission

A second lesson Jesus teaches in this text is one of submission. Faith in God’s ability to help is one side of our relationship with our Lord. The other side is willingness to submit to His answers as the right answers. With very limited vision, we feed our requests to God. We come, thinking we know how God will respond, thinking we really have the better answer.

To the leper in our text, I’m sure he was convinced, immediate healing was the “right” or “better” answer. In the Old Testament today³ we see how God sometimes has a slightly different idea. Naaman brings his request for healing to Elisha. Elisha tells him to go down to the Jordan River and wash in the water of the river, seven times. Recall what Naaman’s

³ See 2 Kings 5

expectation was? Listen again to verse 11: ***Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought he would come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.***

Certainly God could have worked that way, through Elijah, but He didn't. God would not be controlled by Naaman. Naaman must first submit to God's will. The Leper must first come and fall before Jesus. It's not about *telling God* how to fix our lives, it's all about *allowing* God to answer our needs.

Sometimes that is really tough to do. Watch this next little clip. In my opinion, the submission of this woman, her willingness to allow God's answer to be her answer, is nothing short of amazing.

Response

The wisdom of God far exceeds our wisdom. God knows the factors about the future which we cannot begin to understand. Submission is recognition that we do not know the answer to leprosy, cancer, diabetes, death, or life, but God does know.

This past week, I visited several members who are hospitalized. A combination of age and weakening of the heart places the reality of death in the near future as a very real issue. We thanked the Lord for faith. We praise and thank God that He does sustain and encourage us through the tough days. Our prayer was one of submission. Lord, You know what is best for our lives. If you so wish, grant renewed health; if that is not

Your plan then prepare the heart of this saint to spend eternity with You in heaven.

The marvelous Good News for the leper was, “***moved with pity***” Jesus healed him. With Naaman, the Good News was, when he submitted, God forgave and cleansed him.

The Good News for us is, God’s Son has taken all our sins way. He has born our grief and carried our sorrow, He is moved with compassion and pity, He loves us for Jesus sake. God’s desire is that we bring our needs, great and small, before Him.

We are beneficiaries not only of the gentle love of Jesus, but also of His unlimited power, and His unparalleled wisdom. He will respond to our needs, in exactly the right way, and at exactly the right moment. Of this we can be sure. Amen.