

Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

[Sharing God's Love](#) - Luke 5:12-13

For the next three weeks we are going to go back over our vision for St. Paul. It is summed up on everything we print and put out from the church. St. Paul United Methodist Church – sharing God's love, changing lives, serving the community. If we can all get to the place where this is the criterion through which we pass every thought and action in our lives, our community will be better for it and we, St. Paul United Methodist Church, will be following God's design for us.

Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." ¹³ Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately the leprosy left him.

Three things I caught my attention when I read.

- 1 – man states he knows Jesus can heal him if Jesus chooses to
- 2 – Jesus touches the man (Lepers were by law forbidden from entering towns and had to walk on the opposite side of the road when encountering people)
- 3 – Jesus declares that he chooses to heal the man

As I thought about those three things that caught my attention I wondered about how you and I share God's love. Each of these three things will help us to understand and to better develop our capacity to love those God has placed around us.

If we cannot improve in our ability to love than I am wasting your time and my energy. But I believe like most things in our lives given time and intentional practice we can become better. How do I become a better lover of those whom God has placed around me? Today's scripture gives us some clues.

The first thing I noticed was the man stated that he believed Jesus could heal him if that was what Jesus chooses. Does the world still believe Jesus can heal? When people become ill, the non-churched ones, the ones who never grace our doors or who seldom come or even thing about God or Christ, do they believe Jesus can heal them? This leper that Jesus encountered believed, but what about people who know they are ill today?

The full meaning of healing is restoring to wholeness. That means wholeness of mind, spirit, memories, and physical health. Do we proclaim it and encourage the world to believe? Do we testify to the times in our own lives when Jesus has made us whole?

If I want the world around me to come to believe that Jesus can and does heal, what am I doing to help them know that the possibility exists? Maybe the world is not where this leper was when it comes to knowing that Jesus can heal. Maybe Jesus is not even a thought on their mental radar when they become ill.

When a coworker, friend or passing acquaintance tells us they are feeling ill or sick, do we offer to pray for them? When was the last time you heard about someone's illness and prayed with them before you left their fellowship? I'll bet if instead of promising to pray for people we did it while we were present with them, it might make an impression. Or better yet, the next day, the next week ask them how they are doing and has God answered your prayed for their healing yet, when they get better thank God with them for his healing presence in their life.

The second thing I noticed was that Jesus actually reached out and touched the man. He was a leper. You only get the disease by touching someone or something contaminated with the virus. The rule of his day was that lepers never came to town and when seeing a whole person they

passed on the far side of the street so as not to spread their disease. And yet, there it is in black and white print, Jesus touched the leper.

If we are the hands and feet of Jesus today, are we touching the untouchable in our society with his hands? Are we willing to risk our very selves if necessary to convey to another the love that Christ has for them? Leprosy is a disease caught by handling that which is already leprous. Jesus risked his own health when he touched the man. What do we risk in helping share the love of Jesus?

I'm not talking about contributing funds or working at fund raising events, this is the dirty hands and muddy feet of those who actually touch the lives of the hurting, the ill, or the diseased of our society. I'm talking about serving the meals for the new Family Promise families who in the next couple of months will be living in our church for a week at a time while they are prepared to move back into jobs and living facilities. I'm talking about going to Mississippi to tear off wall board and scrub down walls with bleach to kill mold so families can begin to rebuild their lives, so children can return to their schools.

Do we extend our hands and risk our selves in touching the hurting and needy of our community?

The third thing I noticed was that Jesus declares to the man that he chooses for the man to be healthy. Jesus states his desire that this child of God in such poor condition is still worth his time and energy, he wants this man to be whole.

Do we believe that Jesus wishes to heal everyone? How about the child molester or drug addict or alcoholic or out of work bum? What about people who for now are content with their life, they don't see or feel any need to be healed? Can we really believe that Jesus truly cares about everyone being whole again? What are we willing to do about it?

I have a pet peeve about ministers tainting our profession. In Florida over the past several years we have had numerous clergy who have been arrested and some convicted for child solicitation over the internet or divorced from their wives because of affairs with women in the church. There have been some arrested for simple theft and some arrest for elaborate schemes of money fraud.

But having said all of that, I have to tell you I am proud of my United Methodist Church. In every place where we could have walked away from people hurting our church or giving our profession a black eye, we have instead sought to minister hope and love through programs that lead people to change. Numerous opportunities exist for clergy going through rough times in their marriages to find counseling or even take extended sabbaticals for times of marriage enrichment. Clergy caught and even imprisoned for solicitation of minors or acts upon minors find within our penal system United Methodist Clergy and laity who are there to help them find avenues of change and support.

We have not turned our backs; we have reached out with the hands of real people to convey to them in the midst of their brokenness and pain that God does love them. God does want them to be whole again and yes it is possible through Jesus Christ.

The very first thing it says on everything we put out from our church is that we as a church are about SHARING GOD'S LOVE.

Are there ways in your own life that you could become better at loving the community around you? As Christians we know that Jesus loved and gave himself for the whole world. What are you willing to do so that others may experience God's love?