



THE NEW SHOFAR

Jesus healed, cleansed, raised, reconciled, protected and forgave in order that people could be free

Mark 1:40-45 - 2 Kings 5:1-14

Ordinary Sunday 6

February 11th

The missionary's question: What is needed of God?

The encounter between Jesus and this leper occurs in the opening chapter of this Gospel of Mark and the timing is the work of the editor and not an actual historical record. What the evangelist is doing is presenting to his readers an understanding of the reason for the coming of the Christ and at the same time, set down a model of ministry for his own Church. In Jesus we are to see the Father and to understand the relationship God has with his creation.

Here we have a man who is bound up by his illness. Imagine what his life is like. Cut off from his community and forced to live beyond contact with family and friends. He is a creature of shame, someone to be avoided. Worse even than that, this man was separated off from the worshipping community, beyond the Law and so beyond the love and mercy of God. That is the hope-less situation in which he finds himself in the world.

In the place of the leper we can put every human person at one time or another. He is not the extreme we might think he is for there are many *lepers* in our world. Many we do not even see

Who are these "lepers"? The - Homeless? Refugees? Drug and alcohol addicted? Families struggling? Those with mental difficulties? Lonely? Sick? Etc.. What is our parish responsibility towards them? What are we actually doing for "lepers"? How do we locate them in our parish area? Will we?

any more. They are in our streets, our parishes, appear on our televisions every night and we are well acquainted with some of them. The point Mark is making here is how Jesus was sent to reveal the face of his loving and merciful father to them. It was his mission, his ministry in creation. When they encounter Jesus they are encountering a liberating God, a God who has a track record in setting people free. The God of Jesus is the God of the Exodus, a God who hears the cries of his people and frees them from bondage.

St Paul writes of this beautifully and powerfully in **2 Corinthians 5:11-21**. My favourite line is this one...¹⁷*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* This is exactly what is happening in our Gospel story. Mark's account of this healing shows us what happens with the advent of Jesus the Christ into human history. There is an opportunity for a whole new beginning, a very new and refreshing way of looking at the world, at people and at communities – when Christ is welcomed. In Christ and through Christ our understanding of these *lepers* is transformed. They are no longer "refugees" or "druggies" but our brothers and sisters in Christ, people, children of God under the same heavenly Father.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -
anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghongod.com

Here is a bit of a problem: As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

This insight into Christian mission comes from **John 20:21** and the difficulty it creates for all disciples of Christ is the way it sets out mission as being a relationship to and with others. Jesus was not just a teacher and a preacher. He entered into the lives of the people of his time. He became one with us in our fractured humanity. We are called, not to stand off from the world and preach to it or at it. We are to enter into a relationship of liberating love with those who do not know Christ. In an engagement with the faith community and individual believers, the world is to experience the same liberating joy those Hebrew slaves in Egypt felt when God heard their cry and led them out into freedom and a land of *milk and honey*. That cannot be done in our churches, or our rectories but only when we are prepared to *empty ourselves* so that we can be a kind of bridge making a connection between the “lepers” and God. Unless our words and our deeds together reveal God to those in bondage, why would they listen?

The Missionary initiatives of God

It can be a bit of a surprise to find the idea of mission is rarely mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. However, what we do find is an understanding of the universal reign of God and the place and purpose of Israel in the world. In fact, the first eleven chapters of the Bible are all about the universal rule of God, with the Hebrew people as a separate and chosen people only beginning to emerge in chapter twelve of Genesis.

The beginnings of Israel are linked to God’s purposes for humanity and their being chosen by God was never presented as being a sign of divine favouritism. It is better understood as a sign of obligation, a life required of a people living in covenant with God. It brought with it a way of living in the world, a lifestyle that brought Gentiles into a relationship with God. They were *set apart* from the nations, so that they could illuminate the world with the loving reality of God. Freed from the need to be a part of the politics, political correctness, social expectations, and general ways of the world around them, they could give the peoples of the world a glimpse of what it meant to be free, to be fully human and fully alive.

What are some of the ways we, as Christians, as Church, are able to offer something new to the life of the people around us? How can we be “new” to the world if at the same time we are focussed in on keeping our “old ways” going? Explore how, as individuals and as faith communities we might be true, secure and functioning “bridges” to God. How do we reveal God-in-the-world to people without necessarily linking it to coming to our church?

Mission begins with accepting the universal rule of God

The Book of Jonah is a great work of missionary theology, but we need to keep our eyes on its central message. It illustrates the way Israel’s mission was not to go out into the world to preach the universal rule of Yahweh. The Book of Jonah is about reminding Israel it needs to recognise that Yahweh’s rule is already universal. Mission means accepting God as already reigning outside of the geographical borders of Israel, beyond circumcision and the Torah.

Jonah struggled with his mission because it meant accepting Yahweh as the God of the people of Nineveh and this challenged his view of the specialness of Judaism, of Israel. Being the elect of God meant taking on special responsibilities to the world. Like Israel, the Church is called to be as God in the world, taking sides on behalf of the poor, being a voice for the voiceless and to be a celebration of liberation and reconciliation for all “lepers”.

**Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -
anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghgod.com**

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -
anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghongod.com