

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
14 February 2021

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
Psalm 32
1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1
(Luke 7:16) Mark 1:40-45

Widening Our Circle of Compassion

Continuing on from the last two Sundays, today we heard another one of Jesus' series of healings that are found in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Mark.¹ As I preached last week, before Jesus *tells* us why He came into our world, in the Gospel of Mark, He first *shows* us why.

These healings show us that God is with us and close to us, even—and especially—when we are suffering. Furthermore, these *physical* healings of *some* people serve as a sign of a more radical and universal healing that God has in mind for *all* people. This more radical and universal healing is His “victory over sin and death.”² Jesus takes away the sins of the world, thus redeeming each of us, and setting us free to live with Him forever in His Heavenly Kingdom.

That's, generally, what these healing acts show to us. However, we can learn even more from Jesus and those who are cured by looking at the specific circumstances of each healing.

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Last week's healing of Simon's mother-in-law—followed by her immediate response of serving them—revealed to us that Jesus came to heal us of the sickness that our sins cause, which then sets us free to get up and do good in service of Jesus and others.

Furthermore, we noticed that Jesus came from the synagogue just before the healing. Which is an example of what Martin Luther King, Jr., said: “Church is not the place you come to, it's the place you go from.”³ We *come to* church in order to encounter the Lord in a real way, be fed, nourished, and then we are equipped to *go from* church to serve Jesus and others.

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In today's healing, we see Jesus continue to go farther out. Two Sundays ago, Jesus was in the synagogue, healing by driving out an unclean spirit.⁴ Last Sunday, Jesus was at a home very close to the synagogue for His healing.⁵

This Sunday, we heard that Jesus healed a man with leprosy, but the Gospel didn't say exactly *where* Jesus was—at least not at first. However, the First Reading from Leviticus revealed it to us: “[A person with leprosy] shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.”⁶ Therefore, Jesus must've been on the outskirts of town, away from the community, in order for a man with leprosy to come up to him. This is confirmed by the conclusion of the Gospel, as we heard that Jesus “remained outside in deserted places.”⁷

Thus, by tracking Jesus' movements in this series of healings, we see Him teaching us. As Saint Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians, we are to imitate Jesus.⁸ We, too, are to always be looking for our next step outwards, continuing to look for those who are excluded in any way from community and the Body of Christ.

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This reminds me of a quote from Saint Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997): “The problem with the world is that we draw the circle of our family too small.” Jesus came to solve that problem. To redraw the circle of family so that it's no longer too small. So that it's just the right size—the size that God intends it to be. One time I heard Fr. Greg Boyle—the founder of Homeboy Industries, a ministry that helps rehabilitate gang members in Los Angeles⁹—explain how to do it in this way:

The solution is to look around at our own circle. And then, if we see someone outside that circle, to *redraw* our circle to include that person. And then to look around again. And, if we see someone else who is outside our new circle, to redraw it again. And again, and again, and again.¹⁰

As Fr. Greg wrote in his book, *Barking to the Choir*: “Beyond cure and healing, Jesus was always hopeful about widening the circle of compassion and dismantling the barriers that exclude. He stood with the sinner, the leper, and the ritually impure to usher in some new remarkable inclusion, the very kinship of God. Living the gospel, then, is...about choosing to live in this ever-widening circle of inclusion.”¹¹

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Friends, this is what the deepest healing looks like. Sometimes it can include a physical healing. But, *always*, the deepest healing is directed toward victory over sin, death, division, and exclusion. Its purpose is *always* concerned with the salvation of all—God desires that all people be saved.¹²

Just as these series of healings has revealed to us, it *always* begins with our own personal encounter with Jesus. Recognizing that He comes to find us, even when we find ourselves on the outskirts or feeling distant from God. He drives away unclean spirits that enslave us, causing division, exclusion, and destruction. He grasps our hand, He stretches out to touch us, helps us up, and sets us free, so that we can serve Him and others. And then we go forth doing good, one step at a time—one circle at a time—seeing to it that our circles of compassion, love, mercy, and forgiveness “are widened, and no one is left outside.”¹³

¹ The series of healings extends from the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time through the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B): Mark 1:21-2:12

² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1505:

“Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’ (Mt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4). But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the ‘sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29; cf. Isa 53:4-6), of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.”

³ Attribution made by Fr. Gregory Boyle, S.J., during *Laetare Speech* at University of Notre Dame Commencement, 21 May 2017 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eQsHEjRrY)

⁴ Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B): Mark 1:21-28

⁵ Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B): Mark 1:29-31

Dr. Pieter J. Lalleman, “Capernaum and the 'House of Peter': what we can and can't say about it” in *Christian Today*, 8 Aug 2019 (www.christiantoday.com/article/capernaum-and-the-house-of-peter-what-we-can-and-cant-say-about-it/132985.htm):

“In the centre of [Capernaum], some 30 metres to the south of the synagogue and equally far from Lake Galilee, are the remains of a housing block from the first century. Originally it consisted of typical small fishing houses such as one would expect in this port. Tradition says that one of the houses in this block was the home of the apostle Peter.”

⁶ Leviticus 13:46

⁷ Mark 1:45

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:1: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

⁹ homeboyindustries.org

¹⁰ Paraphrased from: Boyle, “Spiritual Practice and Working on the Margins”, Seattle University Institute of Catholic Thought and Culture, Spring 2019 Catholic Heritage Lecture, 9 May 2019 (www.seattleu.edu/ictc/events/catholic-heritage-lectures/past-speakers/2018-19)

¹¹ Boyle, *Barking to the Choir* (2017), 11

¹² See 1 Timothy 2:3-4: “...God our savior...wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.”

¹³ Boyle, 196