

Date: February 11, 2018

Scripture: Mark 1:40-45

Title: OUR GREATEST NEED

Dr. Morris Weigelt went through a time of deep depression in his life. He particularly hit a low spot one night in the hospital when, as he put it, “all of his insecurities and depression came upon him.” Weigelt got out of bed and walked the halls looking for someone awake and willing to give him a hug. With a great deal of pity and humor, he concluded that all he could find was a huge, burly security guard. He said, “Sir, would you give me a hug?” The security guard responded, “I sure will!” Dr. Weigelt indicated that he found comfort and encouragement from the touch of the big burly security guard. He returned to his room and slept peacefully. Have you ever needed someone to give you a hug?

A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Notice what Jesus did. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. Do you know how remarkable this simple act was? No one touched people with leprosy.

The Hebrew law required that no one touch a leper. They were ritually unclean. Secondly, leprosy is a disgusting disease in which the skin putrefies on the body. Who wants to touch someone in such a condition? So this man may have gone for many years without the simplest human contact. Think about that, years without a touch. Every one of us needs physical, human touching.

Studies show that babies who are not touched may die. Experts tell us that infants need to be held a lot. They have a basic need for physical warmth. Most authorities believe that you cannot spoil an infant by touching them.

Marcel Gerber was sent by a United Nations committee to study the effects of protein deficiency on Ugandan children. She found, to her surprise, that Uganda’s infants were developmentally the most advanced in the world. It was only after two years of age that the children began to be seriously damaged by such things as tribal taboos and food shortages. Why were they so healthy? It seems that Ugandan infants are almost constantly held by their mothers and mother surrogates. They go everywhere with their mothers. The physical contact with the mother and the constant movement seemed to be the factors that propelled these infants to maturity beyond Western standards.

Many young parents today understand this principle and make it a practice to massage their infants. That’s a wise practice. We all have a need to be touched. Studies have shown that touching has physiological benefits, even for adults. One researcher made numerous studies on the effects of this practice, Christians recognize this and call

it “laying on of hands.” She discovered that when one person lays hands on another, the hemoglobin levels in the bloodstreams of both people go up, which means that body tissues receive more oxygen, producing more energy and even regenerative power.

Jesus could have healed this man with leprosy simply by speaking to him, but he reached out and touched him too. He knew that this was exactly what this man needed.

This is a spiritual principle we need to recognize and understand: Christ gives us individually what we really need. This man needed to be touched. Jesus dealt with other people in other ways. Remember the blind man upon whose eyes Jesus applied the moist clay. Others received what they needed by the spoken word. To a paralyzed man, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” Some theologians suggest that this man’s paralysis may have resulted from a sinful lifestyle. Maybe he needed to have those sins forgiven before he could be fully restored to wholeness. Grace is communicated to different people in different ways.

That’s true in our worship services. Some of you are especially moved by the music. Others are moved simply by the beauty and the reverence of this room. Some of you are moved by a reassuring handshake or hug. Some of you by prayer time. For others of you, it’s the sacrament, the Lord’s Supper. Touching the bread and the cup speak more eloquently to your heart than anything I could ever say. And for one or two of you, perhaps it could even be the sermon that you need. Christ ministers to each of us in our own way.

There’s a delightful story of two traveling angels who stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion’s guest room. Instead the angels were given a space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, “Things aren’t always what they seem.”

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had, the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night’s rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angel found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, “How could you have let this happen! The first man had everything, yet you helped him. The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let their cow die.”

The older angel replied, “Things aren’t always what they seem. When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I

sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it. Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I told him to take the cow instead."

What a great story! Things are not always what they seem. To the world's eyes, life is unfair. Good people suffer; horrendous people go through life unscathed. But through the eyes of faith, we say confidently that God grants to each, what he or she needs. This world isn't the final commentary on God's will or God's purpose. There's an unseen hand at work in our lives. And somehow, when the final tally is made, life works out.

This man needed Jesus' touch and that's exactly what Jesus gave him. This brings us to a second spiritual principle: **Christ is willing to meet our every need.** The man with leprosy came to Jesus 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!" Those are powerful words, "I am willing." Christ is willing to heal our every hurt. Christ is willing to take away every sin. Christ is willing to grant us new life, if only we ask. Christ is willing to do for us, everything we truly need. Notice that I didn't say, "everything we want." God works according to our individual NEEDS. What we want, may not, in the long run of things, be what we really need. God is willing to give us everything we need.

And this brings us to spiritual principle number three: **Our greatest need is the ability to trust God in all things.** Jesus said, "I am willing. Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left the man and he was cured. Christ can do that. Christ can cleanse us and make us whole.

Dawn Weiss' life was falling apart. Dawn, a recovering alcoholic, moved to Tennessee after the California earthquake of 1994. She got a job as a waitress and enrolled in school. But Dawn had never confronted the stress of an earthquake, of moving, of leaving loved ones. One night, she felt ready to give up. She prayed for help, but didn't feel any better. That night, Dawn decided that after work she would go out drinking.

When Dawn got to work, she noticed that every single customer in the restaurant was wearing a button that read, "I am a friend of Bill W." Bill W. is the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and this slogan helps AA members discreetly recognize one another. To Dawn's surprise, there was a huge Alcoholics Anonymous convention in town that weekend. All the customers at her restaurant that night were attending it. After Dawn revealed her own struggle with addiction, a group of customers offered to stay with her all night and protect her from drinking. Dawn had prayed for help, and God sent her a whole convention of people who understood her problem.

Christ can do that. Christ can cleanse us and make us whole. Medical science was completely unable to treat leprosy when Jesus healed this man. There was no known

treatment or medicine that could possibly restore his body, make him “clean” again, revive feeling in his deadened limbs. Only Christ’s power could do that. In the same way, many of us have lost faith in God’s power and purpose in our lives. We, too, are spiritually dead, we have no feeling of purpose in life, yet Christ can cleanse and restore us, giving us not just life, but abundant life.

Notice that when the man with leprosy first came to Jesus, he fell on his face, in front of Jesus, an act of reverence, that was only afforded to a king.

He was acknowledging Jesus’ kingship over life. That’s the greatest need many of us have. We think other needs, are more pressing, but our needs will fall in place if we acknowledge Jesus’ kingship over life. Our greatest need is the ability to trust God in all things. Our greatest need is to make Christ King of our lives. So Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.