

Rev. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

8/9 /09 "What Does It Mean to Be Healed by Jesus?" Mark 1:40-45

What does it mean to be healed by Jesus? A clear answer can be found in the scripture lesson for this morning.

A man with a serious skin disease comes to Jesus begging to be healed. Jesus is filled with compassion and touches him and says, "Be clean." Immediately the man becomes clean. Jesus then tells him to go to the priest and show his clean body.

Here we need to understand what it meant to be unclean in Jesus' time. The Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament gives us some hint.

"If you ever have leprosy, you must tear your clothes, leave your hair uncombed, cover the lower part of your face, and go around shouting, 'I'm unclean. I'm unclean.' You must live alone outside the camp."

Here the word "unclean" did not mean just dirty or unsightly. Unclean meant, "Cursed by God." Those who had serious skin diseases were singled out as ones who were abandoned by God.

Here we can point out two theological understandings that were taken for granted in those days. One, human beings are divided into those who are clean and those who are unclean. Two, God loves the clean only and rejects the unclean.

Jesus absolutely rejected these two theological presuppositions.

This is clear from the fact that Jesus was filled with compassion, and that he touched the untouchable in the name of God. That meant one thing. Jesus rejected the religious doctrine that God's love was conditional.

Jesus denied the theological idea that the scope of God's love was limited only to the clean. Jesus sided with this desperate soul and stood against the prevailing prejudice of his time on his behalf.

Imagine how uplifted this man must have been. Imagine how joyous he must have been when he discovered that in the sight of God, he was precious and infinitely important.

He was made aware that he was a unique individual in the sense that no one in this world could take his place. Regardless of what society thought about him, he was worthy, because God loved him.

So Jesus' healing went far deeper than curing the disease. He did much more than that. He freed him from despair to hope, from indignity to dignity.

There is one more thing we should not forget with regard to Jesus' healing. Jesus gave this man a specific responsibility, a task, a job to do when he healed him. "Go to the priest and present yourself to him."

What does it mean to show the priest the clean body?

The priest was represented two things: (1) He represented the theology that insists that God accepts some people and rejects others and (2) He represented our world which ranks human beings in accordance with social status, economic power, political authority, and so on.

To be healed by Jesus demands the responsibility to firmly say, "No." to the claim of the priest, this world. The healed must be on the side of the poor and oppressed. The healed are called to proclaim a God of love and mercy, not a God of division and discrimination.

What does this all mean to us, members of JAUC? We are to commit ourselves anew to making this church truly loving, genuinely open, and authentically Christian, so that the world will know the love of God through us.

That is an awesome responsibility. Awesome, indeed. It is what braces us for the living of these days.

Thanks be to God. Amen

