

It was written from the perspective of an adopted pet that has dealt with loneliness, abandonment, and loss. Hope on her Facebook page said that as soon as she read that letter, she started to weep.

That's because she knew Sylvie's story. She knew that the dog had been abandoned by all of her other owners several times.

Hope said, quote, the part that read, will you still want me, really hit me, because Sylvie has been moved around so much, all she's ever really known is a crate.

[7 : 17] Faith family stories like that, even when they're about animals, grip us, because every one of us knows that one of the saddest experiences in life is that of loneliness, or abandonment, or loss.

And my guess is that there are some of you here tonight, and some of you watching online, you know what that feeling is like. For some of you, maybe you were abandoned as a child.

Some of you, you know what that lonely walk all alone is like. The feeling in the morning of waking up alone. The birthday celebration all by yourself.

The empty pews. The silence of a nursing home. The phone that never rings anymore. A spouse that never was.

Or a future that never will be. Most of us, at some point in our life, has experienced loneliness, abandonment, or loss.

[8 : 33] And you say, Pastor, that's a really, really sad way to start a sermon. But faith family, that's every single day in the life of this man in Mark chapter 1.

Every single day he woke up was full of abandonment, loss, and loneliness. All this man ever knew was a crate.

Look at verse 40. It says, And a leper came to Jesus, imploring him, kneeling, and said to him, If you will, you can make me clean.

Faith family, when we read that verse, we need to understand that verse is shocking. That verse is scandalous. That verse is socially awkward.

It's almost unheard of. And in order for us to really understand that, we need to go inside the life of a leper. And I realize that for some of you, this is not the first time that you've studied this kind of thing, but let's think through this again.

[9 : 49] What was the life of a leper like? In the ancient Near East, to have leprosy was basically a death sentence. For instance, you were physically hopeless.

Leprosy usually would start with a rash. The hair at that part of the skin would then fall out. The skin around it would become numb. It would start to spread across your body, working its way to the outer parts like the fingers or toes or nose, and your body would start to deform.

And because there was no cure for leprosy, you would be stuck in this kind of condition physically for the rest of your life. Socially, you were isolated.

As many of you will well know, the Old Testament had very strict laws against diseases, specifically leprosy. And if you're wondering where that is in the Bible, it's the part of the Bible you don't like to read, like Leviticus, right?

Leviticus chapter 13 and 14 where you skip. It talks about these things. So for instance, if you thought you might have a disease or thought you might have leprosy, you would go to the priest for an examination.

[11 : 10] And look at what Leviticus chapter 13 verse 45 says. The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose.

He shall cover his upper lip and cry out, unclean, unclean. He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease.

Why? He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be where, faith family? Outside the camp.

In fact, of the 61 defilements in the Jewish law, leprosy is the second worst. Anybody want to guess what the first one is?

A corpse. That's the highest level of unclean, a corpse. And second to a corpse, second to a dead body is leprosy.

[12 : 13] Leprosy was like being unvaccinated. That's a joke. That's a joke. Don't throw anything at me. But I thought, listen, those of you that know me, like I don't get political in my sermons and I'm certainly not doing this.

I'm really, my genuine heart is to use things that are going on today to give you insights to the scripture. So just know that that's all I'm trying to do here. But I thought about when you look at what's happening in our culture with people who have chosen not to be vaccinated for whatever reason, there may be cities that they can't go to, restaurants they can't eat in.

I've actually talked with people, some from our faith family, some outside, who lost their jobs or would lose their jobs because they had not taken the vaccine.

In other words, if you've experienced that or felt that, times that by a thousand, and that's what this man lived every day.

Shunned, judged, rejected. No one would have anything to do with him. Lepers were the rejects of the rejects.

[13:20] That's what life was like for them every day. And there's actually a clue in our passage as to just how socially rejected this man was. Look back at verse 32.

That evening, so this is prior to our passage, that evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons, and the whole city was gathered together at the door.

Everybody look right here. All the sick, all the diseased, except this man.

No one cared to bring him along. In fact, in Luke's gospel, we discover that his skin is white, meaning he's had leprosy for so long, he's probably in the final stages.

And when people look at him, they say, there's no hope for you. Physically hopeless, socially isolated, thirdly, religiously unclean.

[14:33] He cannot go to the temple. He cannot offer a sacrifice. The priest won't even talk to him, much less go near him. This is the kind of person you do not allow in church.

And fourthly, he is sinfully shamed. How many of you remember back in John chapter 9, do you remember earlier in this series when we were dealing with John chapter 9, and Jesus and the disciples walk by the blind man, and do you remember they say to Jesus, who sinned, him or his parents?

How many of you remember that? Yeah, and Jesus says, it's actually neither. And what I pointed out in that and elsewhere is that the mentality in the ancient Near East, the mentality in this day was that if you had a disease or a sickness, it was because you had done something sinful.

Well, imagine what they think about this guy. I mean, if he's got the second worst thing you can have, short of a corpse, he must have done something really, really bad.

In other words, this guy's getting what he deserves. Are you starting to feel what the life of a leper was like? Physically hopeless, socially isolated, religiously unclean, sinfully shamed.

[15:57] It reminds me, do you remember, we're gonna get really theological for a moment, of the sneetches from Dr. Seuss? How many of you remember that? Now the star-belly sneetches had bellies with stars and the plain-belly sneetches had none upon theirs.

This is so deep. And because they had stars, all the star-belly sneetches would brag, we're the best kind of sneetch on the beaches. And with their snoots in the air, they'd sniff and they'd snort.

We'll have nothing to do with those plain-belly sort. And whenever they met some, when they were out walking, they'd hike right on past them without even talking.

They kept them away! Never let them come near! And that's how they treated them year after year.

That's this man's everyday. He's a leper. And that means his life is ignored, avoided, distant, disgraced, rejected, unloved, unwelcomed, untouched, alone.

[17:13] All he's ever known is a crate. And the only thing that's going to change his situation is if he experiences a...

It could have been louder, but I'll take it, all right? It's the only thing that's going to change his situation is a... Another chance? Miracle!

And evidently, that's exactly what he's heard about Jesus because that is the only explanation for why he would approach Jesus. He knows good and well you're not allowed to approach anybody.

You can't even come close. I mean, you think social distancing is a thing. Now, lepers had to stay far off and announce their uncleanness, but this guy has the courage to approach Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus is the glimmer of hope in this man's hopeless life. And this man knows that Jesus can heal him.

[18:16] The question is, will he? This is not an issue of can he. This is an issue of will he? That is, nobody else has cared in my life.

Nobody else has given a rip about me. Nobody else has ever taken the time. Nobody else has ever done anything for me. Will Jesus be like everybody else?

Is my condition that which even God is unwilling to go? And when he asked Jesus for healing, I wonder if those couple of seconds in between, Jesus' response felt like in eternity.

And then Jesus says this, verse 41, moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, and if this is not underlined in your Bible, it better be a brand new Bible.

Alright? Underline it. He touched him and said to him, I will be clean. And, say it, immediately, the leprosy left him and he was made clean.

[19 : 34] Notice that Jesus does not do what everybody else in his life to this point has done. He doesn't say, hey, social distance, hey, stay away, hey, sicko, hey, don't you know what the law says?

Jesus doesn't say that. The text says he's moved with pity. In the original language, that means two things. It's a weird mixture of anger and compassion.

Anger because Jesus is upset with the curse of sin upon the world, just like he was with Lazarus. But at the same time, he has compassion on this man's condition.

But what is miraculous in this text is not, are you listening to me? Because this is important. It's not just that Jesus heals. It's how Jesus heals.

It's not just miraculous that he heals. Oh, that is most certainly miraculous. It is miraculous how he heals. Look at verse 41 again.

[20 : 44] Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and say it, he, oh, touched him? And you say, why are you making such a big deal out of that?

Because we know from previous miracles in this series, Jesus doesn't have to touch him. Jesus healed the official's son from 15 miles away.

Jesus raised Lazarus with just a word. Lazarus, come out. Jesus has just earlier in Mark chapter 1 cast out a demon by just saying so.

In other words, all Jesus has to do is say, you're healed. But Jesus, I think this is beautiful, purposefully and intentionally touches the untouchable.

Ah! What? It's a leper. Stay back.

[21 : 58] Cover your mouth. Don't breathe his hair. Don't come any closer. It's okay, John. It's okay. Rabbi, Rabbi, you cannot, it's disease, you can't.

Please. Please. Please. don't turn away from me.

I won't. Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Only if you want to, I submit to you.

My sister, she was a servant at the wedding. She told me what you could do. I know you can heal me if you are willing. I am willing.

Be cleansed. If you were willing to do this, Oh, my God.

[23 : 47] Oh, my God. Thank you. In that last image, when Jesus is hugging a man who hasn't been touched in years.

It's not just that Jesus heals him. It's how he heals him. Amen. I could just say you're healed.

But you've been an untouchable all your life. Come near. That's the miraculous compassion of Jesus.

And the question is probably, and I'm sure the disciples and those around are like, no, no, no, no, no. Jesus, you know the law better than anybody else.

You can't touch the unclean because if you touch the unclean, what do you become? Unclean. And so now Jesus, by touching this leper, is unclean, except there's no evidence of leprosy anymore.

[25 : 16] Notice this on the screen. Jesus does not touch the unclean because what Jesus touches is made clean. That's the power and miracle of Jesus.

Now, we've been asking throughout this series, what does this teach us about Jesus? Here's just a couple of things and then we'll move on in our passage. First, his power, Jesus' power is shown in his ability to heal.

So this shows us, as we have seen in every miracle, Jesus has the ability. And the man knew that. Amen? I mean, by now, everybody knows you have the power, the ability to heal.

And secondly, we see his grace, his compassion, in that he is willing to. He is willing to touch the untouchable.

So, we see here the life of a leper in verse 40. We see the compassion of Christ in the miracle, verse 41 through 42. Now, what I want us to do to stop for a moment, okay?

[26 : 26] So, we've kind of been in the weeds. Can we step back for a minute and see the whole picture? Are you with me? What is Mark doing? Why is Mark stringing these along in his gospel?

Let's look for just a moment at the big view of what's happening. Not just the one story. Thirdly, the portrait here of the kingdom. Mark, as I told you last week, has been revealing right out of the gate in his gospel that Jesus is the long-awaited king.

And with Jesus comes the kingdom of God. He is able to take that which is wrong and make it right. It's why Mark chapter 1, verse 1, he's the son of God.

Verse 2 and 3, John the Baptist prepares the way for the king. He receives the anointing of the spirit at his baptism, verse 9. He goes out in the wilderness and defeats his enemy, verse 12.

He preaches, verse 14, the kingdom of God is at hand. And then he calls his disciples. And then he shows that he has authority.

[27 : 38] Are you still with me? He has authority over all the other kingdoms. Why? Because evidently there's a guy in the synagogue who's been going to synagogue every week until one day he goes to synagogue and the guest preacher is Jesus, the king who has brought this kingdom.

And guess who reacts? An unclean spirit. Because now the powers of darkness have been invaded by the light.

Amen? Well now what is Mark showing us? I believe he's showing us who gets in this kingdom.

Who are the kind of people that will be drawn to this kingdom that get in?

Answer, lepers! And every opportunity I have to preach this, I'm going to preach this. Because this gets to the core of what faith family is all about and what our culture is.

Amen? Those that get the kingdom or those that realize their only hope is the grace and compassion of Jesus. That there is nothing they can do to save their condition.

[28 : 52] There is nothing they can do to make themselves clean. In fact, I believe this encounter with the leper is a vivid picture of what Jesus taught us.

Remember back earlier in the year when we went through the Sermon on the Mount? This means yes. Please tell me you haven't forgotten it already. And the Sermon on the Mount starts, okay, here's your quiz.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom. In other words, who gets the kingdom?

Those that realize they're desperate. And all they have as way of hope is the grace of Jesus.

Mark here is showing us that Jesus is bringing people into the kingdom and it's not the kind of people you would think. Won't find a lot of Pharisees.

[29 : 53] There'll be a couple. But you'll find a lot of lepers. Why? Because Jesus came for those who know they're sick. And therefore are aware of their need for a physician.

Let me say two things quickly by application and I must move on. I have four more points. Just kidding. Is this. This for us ought to give us the mindset of the church.

If I'm correct that Mark is showing us the kingdom here and all these different snapshots and now we're seeing the kind of people that get into the kingdom, blessed are the poor in spirit, then that needs to shape our mindset of what we think about the church.

This is a quote from Brennan Manning which I have read many times but it's worth reading again.

Quote, Something is radically wrong when the local church rejects a person accepted by Jesus.

Amen? Jesus came for the corporate executives, street people, superstars, farmers, hookers, addicts, IRS agents, AIDS victims, and yes, even used car salesmen.

[31 : 01] No offense if you're one of those. Jesus not only talks to these people but he dines with them. Fully aware that his table fellowship with sinners will raise the eyebrows of religious bureaucrats who hold up the robes and the insignia of their authority to justify their condemnation of the truth and their rejection of the gospel of grace.

Faith family, let us not be a church that rejects what Jesus accepts. Amen? Amen. This should shape the way we think about the kingdom and the way we think about the church.

Secondly, is the mission of the church. That is, when we see what I think Mark is doing here by including this story of the leper, it should not only shape the way we think about who gets in.

Now this one may sting a little bit more but who we're called to serve. Who we are called to serve.

Now, many of you, if you know me, you know I've been a student of church history for many years.

I love church history. In addition to, obviously, the Bible, church history gives me a lot of comfort because when things go on in our world, I have a tendency to be able to say this is not new.

[32 : 15] It's just a different face with a different name but it's something the church has already had the face before and it persevered. And we will too.

Amen? So church history has helped a lot in my Christian faith. And back in the first three centuries of Christian history, there were two plagues that devastated the Roman Empire.

Death tolls were enormous during these plagues. In fact, the first one, about a third of the empire died and in the second one, about 5,000 people daily were dying.

It was a significant, significant time of suffering. But you know what was interesting? A lot of people fled and ran to save themselves but do you know what Christians did?

They stayed. And not only did they stay, they served those who were dying. Listen to what Dionysius, I know you were driving here saying, I hope he quotes Dionysius.

[33 : 25] I haven't heard from Dionysius in a while. Now would be a good time. Well here's what Dionysius of Alexandria said. He was a Christian leader during this time and listen to what he says.

Quote, Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of another.

Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ. And with them departed this life serenely happy.

For they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.

Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred death to themselves and died in their stead. The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner.

[34 : 26] Listen, the pagans behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and listen, fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated the unburied corpses as dirt.

Do you see what he's saying? Is when the sickness happened, when the disease, when these plagues happened in the first few centuries in the Roman Empire, most people fled, Christians went in.

Even if it cost them their own life. Where do you think those early Christians learned that? Where do you think they learned how to touch untouchables?

They saw it in the very life of their Lord Jesus. Think, church, about our mission.

Who is, right here, right here, and I gotta hurry up, gotta hurry up. Who is your untouchable? And it may have nothing to do with a physical disease. Who is your untouchable?

[35 : 51] Who is that person? Who is that political view? Who is that neighbor? Who is that co-worker?

That every time you think of it, every time you think of them, you just wanna run the other way. You just wanna cringe. The last thing you'd ever wanna do is go near them. Well, my dear friend, that is your mission.

Amen. Because Jesus has not called us to flee like everybody else. He's called us to enter in. No matter what it costs.

Amen? Amen. Really? Amen? Amen. This is the kingdom of God. Fourth, back to our text. You can't help here but see an uncontainable joy.

Look at how this man responds after he is healed. Verse 44. So, or verse 43. Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once and he said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone but go and show yourself to the priests and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded for a proof to them.

[37 : 03] Now, what happens? Verse 45. He went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places.

Okay? I gotta hit this quick. When I read this and I study this, I like, I feel bad for the guy. Don't you? Be honest. Do you not understand both sides of this dilemma?

One side is Jesus says don't go tell anybody. And there's good reason why Jesus doesn't want him to go tell anybody because Jesus didn't come to start a medical clinic.

Jesus is not a meal on wheels. Yes, he has compassion on the sick but he has not come to gather crowds that want a miracle. Jesus has come for those that are interested in knowing God.

And so we've seen this throughout the miracle ministry of Jesus. He has no problem doing miracles but he's not interested in a show. Amen? And so he doesn't want this guy to go and say anything and I'm not gonna make any excuses for the guy.

[38 : 08] He shouldn't have said anything. Why? Because Jesus told him not to. On the other hand, right? I'm not making excuses for him and I've already stated the obvious.

This man kinda can't help but tell everybody what Jesus did for him. Right? Do you give the guy a little grace or mercy? By the way, Jesus gives him mercy because later on in Mark he'll have Jesus over to his house.

Okay? So Jesus, even though he didn't want him to do this, they're cool. Alright? They make up. Alright? But this guy has been transformed and how in the world are you not gonna tell anybody about what Jesus has done in your life?

Amen? I mean, yeah, Jesus, I understand. I shouldn't have told anybody but I'm changed. My life has been forever transformed because of you.

I can't be silent about that. I'm not saying we make excuses for him but I am saying I understand why he's so overwhelmed with joy.

[39 : 17] Amen? It makes me think about Luke 17 when Jesus heals ten lepers and look at what he says in verse 15. This is Luke 17 verse 15.

Then one of them, one of the lepers, when he saw that he had been healed because they were healed as they were walking away, turned back praising God with a loud voice and fell on his face at Jesus' feet giving him thanks.

Now he was a, ooh, Jesus not only likes lepers, he likes Samaritan lepers. That's the worst. And Jesus answered, weren't there ten?

where are the nine? Faith family, may we not be like those other nine.

May we be like the one and the one in Mark chapter 1, cleansed and grateful. Amen. Cleansed and overflowing with joy.

[40 : 30] You probably aren't going to find this guy complaining about the weather because he's been changed and that transformation in his life overshadows everything else.

Are you in the nine where you've been saved but you don't have a grateful heart? Or are you the one tonight that says, Jesus has saved me and I am praising God.

It happened 30 years ago and I'm still praising God because I'm not over the grace so glorious in my life.

Are you with me, faith family? The life of the leper, the compassion of Jesus. I think this shows us a portrait of the kingdom. It shows us the uncontainable joy that this man has and then the final thing I want you to see tonight as we leave is that this passage is exploding with the gospel.

Shocker. Right? I wonder if by now, for those of you that have been a part of faith family and you know that we're all about bringing things into the gospel faithfully and in the text, we're not just trying to pull it out of thin air.

[41 : 46] If you were reading this passage, where would you see the gospel? I would submit to you there are at least three signs of the gospel here in Mark chapter 1.

Now, first is probably the most obvious and I think many of you would get this one and that is the healing of the leper. The miracle itself.

What we've been looking at through this series is that miracles are signs. The point is not the miracle itself, it's what the miracle is pointing to. It's never about the physical thing like, for instance, getting your stomach full of bread.

It's about Jesus being your bread. Amen? It's not about Lazarus walking out of the grave. It's about Jesus being the resurrection and the life.

You with me? And so these signs are pointing us to something greater. Same thing here. The healing of this man's physical disease is a sign of salvation.

[42 : 52] Because like leprosy, sin has isolated us from God. We are unclean. Sin has spread to all of our life.

It affects our words, it affects our attitudes, it affects our actions, it affects our relationships, it affects our world. Amen? Sin has no self-cure.

There is nothing that we can do to solve sin. Our only hope is the compassion and grace of Jesus. In other words, we are spiritual lepers.

Desperate as this man was desperate for Jesus' transforming work. In other words, when you read this story, you don't feel pity for this man.

You say, apart from Jesus, I am this man. This is me. I am a leper. That is one picture of the gospel.

[43 : 55] Can anybody see another one? Here's the second one, and that's the custom of Moses. Do you notice here in verse 44, we don't like much, we're almost done, where he says, show yourself to the priest and offer your cleansing what Moses commanded.

Does anybody know what they were supposed to do? Hey, you ready for a beautiful picture of the gospel? Come here online. I know you're listening. When somebody that had a disease went to the priest and had been healed of their disease, what they would do is they would take two doves, a little bit gross, and they would cut the head off of one dove.

They would slit its throat. They would take the blood of that dove with water and they would dip a branch in it and they would sprinkle it on the other dove and then they would let that second dove go.

And the picture of that sacrifice was to say, remember, this person had a disease and that old, are you listening? That old life, that old you, that diseased you is dead and you now have a new life. You have been set free because you've been healed. You don't have that disease anymore. Is that not a beautiful picture of the gospel? That Jesus died and our disease of sin and death died and we've been given new life and set free in him because of his sacrifice for us.

[45 : 34] Amen? Amen? You can do better, but I love you. What's the third picture of the gospel?

It's what I call here trading places. Trading places. Let me show you it in the text and then we'll wrap it up. Verse 45. But he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in what?

Desolate places. Do you see what's happened? At the beginning of the story, who's isolated? The leper.

And Jesus can go anywhere he wants. But now because Jesus has healed the man, what's happened? Jesus is isolated and the leper can go anywhere he wants.

They have traded places. And that, my friend, is exactly what Jesus has done with us. He traded places with us.

[46 : 39] He took our sin so we could be free. He was abandoned by the Father. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So that we could draw near anytime we want.

That's the beauty of the gospel. What does this text teach us? The life of a leper, that of isolation. The compassion of Jesus, emphasizing that he touches him.

The portrait of the kingdom, that those that get the kingdom are the poor in spirit. Those that realize that they have nothing of which that they can earn God's grace.

We see the joy of salvation, that our gratitude for God should be uncontainable because of his mercy. And we see the good news of the gospel.

So what about you tonight? What about you? Are you like Sylvie? Like the leper in Mark 1?

[47 : 42] Do you come with baggage? Do you come with baggage? Have you made stupid decisions? Do you feel unclean?

Is all you've ever known a crate? And maybe you're wondering, like the leper in Mark 1, I know Jesus can receive me.

I'm just not sure he will. Well, faith family, Jesus' willingness to receive you into the kingdom is not found in Mark 1.

It's found in Mark 15. Because in Mark 15, Jesus does not touch the unclean. Jesus becomes the unclean.

Not by healing a leper, but by becoming a corpse. And why did Jesus become the lowest form of unclean?

[48 : 48] So that you and I would forever be clean. So that if all you've ever known is a crate, you can rest assured you have been adopted by the cross.

For the good news of the gospel for lepers like us is you don't have to social distance. you can draw near through the risen Christ.

And all God's people said, Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Let's pray. God, we thank you for this great truth tonight. Oh, that it would encourage us that we would, like this one, like the one in Luke 17, that we would be so grateful that we would be overflowing with joy.

Not because of the circumstances of our life. They are often terrible. But you are still worthy of praise. and the work that you have done in our life, that of salvation, is always something from which we can praise you for.

We are lepers. We don't have pity on this man. We are just like him. But you did a work in our life by your grace. And you have brought us into your kingdom.

[50 : 07] And for that, we rejoice. If there is somebody here tonight and they don't know you, God, would you by your spirit draw them to you right now by faith.

And just like it might seem unthinkable for this leper to approach Jesus, I pray that tonight, even though it may seem unthinkable to them, that they would approach you in faith tonight.

And discover that you are not only willing to receive them, you are able to receive them as well. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen.