Good morning, my dear family. Continuing in our journey this morning toward the cross, we approach the joy and celebration of Easter. Our desire and commitment in this season of Lent is to pursue a closer walk with Jesus. Thank God for the blood of Jesus that cleanses us of our sin and brings intimate fellowship with our Lord. In our Gospel reading today, we see the scope of all that is ours in Christ in the story of the cleansed leper (Luke 5:12-16, see Passages in support of this sermon at the end of this text), a first step in the unfolding of Christ’s ministry. Last week, we saw Christ’s power over Satan; this week, we see His power over disease and His ability to heal and cleanse. Very soon, upon our arrival at the empty tomb, we see His power over death.

 To understand the significance of this moment in Jesus’ ministry, we need to learn about leprosy, a painful skin disease. People with the condition are outcasts in first century Palestine; they are shunted to the outskirts of society, forbidden to come near to anyone without the disease. If they move among society, they must call out, “UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN!” Their lives represent a sort of living death, suffering isolation and destitution. They become beggars, and they could be stoned to death for violating their quarantine, a legal statis based on the Old Testament. Historian Josephus writes that lepers are to be treated like dead men. Moreover, Family, throughout scripture, leprosy illustrates sin, helplessness, hopelessness, and ultimately, the human need for a savior, a redeemer. The leper with whom Jesus interacts in Luke’s tale is an outcast, full of shame, sure he is defined by his disease and his past. Certainly, he doesn’t “feel like praying”; “What were people going to think?” In his life, he has rehearsed excuse after excuse for remaining isolated and unredeemed. BUT, we serve a Savior who is undeterred in His mission to redeem and rescue. This man comes to the passing Jesus in urgency, desperation, reverence, and humility. He is a picture of the first

four beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-6\*). He has a beatitude attitude; he has done an honest assessment of his own condition and determined that he needs redemption.

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\*Matthew 5:3-6

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Lepers were excluded from community and from the corporate worship of God. This leper comes to Jesus in worship, calling Him “Lord.” The word for “Lord” used here is *proskuneo;* it means to kiss the hand, to pay homage (see Mark 1 and Matthew 8 for a fuller picture of this event). The man, this leper, doesn’t ask for healing. Made bold with faith, he says, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Church, listen. *He* is willing. To cleanse us, to redeem us, to save us, to forgive us, and to free us from our past. You can almost hear the desperation in the leper’s voice, as if he says, “Are you interested in me? In doing something in me.” I always thought the leper’s address of Jesus weird, until I looked at the statement through the eyes of the leper. What he’s saying is “Lord, I know your authority and power. Are you interested? You can! But I have nothing to bring, nothing fit for a King.” The situation almost causes the leper’s statement to turn back on itself:

“Am I willing?

Willing—in faith--to humble myself, to lay down my past, my addiction, my sin, my hopelessness,

to the only one who can do the cleansing?”

Look at the response of Jesus: “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ And immediately the leprosy left him” (Luke 5:13).

This attention from Jesus was possibly the first physical, human contact the leper has had in a long time. For us, this attentive gesture means that none of us is a burden to Jesus. There is more grace in Jesus than sin in us! Psalm 103:1-13\* speaks to the “loving-kindness” of our God. This word is *hesed* in the original language. It is a word used 248 times in scripture, and it’s a primary way God describes His love for us. It’s more than an emotional bond. It encompasses God’s resolve and covenant choice to love us and to show mercy. *Hesed* is a love that chose a cross to redeem the object of that love. Is He willing? Yes? Are we? *Hesed* is the scope of all that is ours in Christ.

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\*Psalm 103:1-13

1 Praise the Lord, my soul;

 all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

2 Praise the Lord, my soul,

 and forget not all his benefits—

3 who forgives all your sins

 and heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the pit

 and crowns you with love and compassion,

5 who satisfies your desires with good things

 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

6 The Lord works righteousness

 and justice for all the oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,

 his deeds to the people of Israel:

8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious,

 slow to anger, abounding in love.

9 He will not always accuse,

 nor will he harbor his anger forever;

10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve

 or repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

 so great is his love for those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,

 so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion on his children,

 so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him . . .

Christ’s miracles are sermons in action. The fulfill prophecy and prove His authority and His power, and they also display His heart. And for us, the presence of Jesus demands a response (Mark 1:44-45\*). Jesus tells the now-cleansed leper to keep quiet about his deliverance, but the leper tells everyone. The leper offers an example, telling us to tell everybody, and we keep quiet. The Savior comes to cleanse, to save, and to redeem. Know that you are not a burden to Him. He invites us to walk close to Him—extends His hand. Imagine the testimony of the leper—telling and retelling of all that he has received—all because Christ is willing. Listen to this invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). ALL means ALL! You don’t have to clean up before coming to Christ. He is willing! You don’t have to be a bible scholar or have it all figured out. The invitation is simple and all-encompassing. He is willing. Are we?

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\*Mark 1:44-45

44 “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Passages in support of this sermon:

1 John 1:5-10

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all[a] sin.

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Luke 5:12-16

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.[a] When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

14 Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.