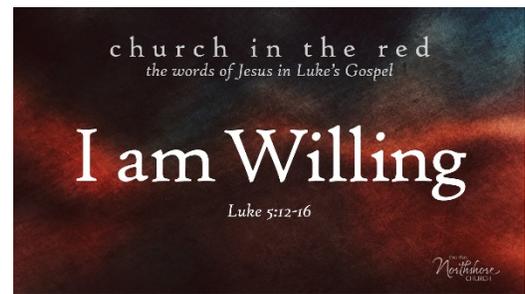


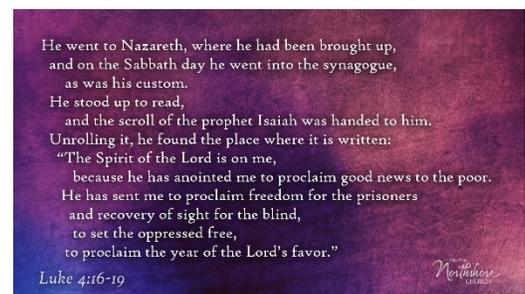
# I Am Willing

I'm glad to be back in our *Church in the Red* series after a few weeks of guests and such. We'll have today, and two more Sundays, before we take another break for Advent. Advent! How are we just a few weeks away from Advent?



To set the stage, Luke 5 still has us in the home region of Jesus: Galilee. He is *living out* the mission statement he declared earlier, reading Scripture in his home synagogue (Nazareth) from the Messianic prophecy penned by Isaiah, proclaiming:

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” <sup>q 1</sup>

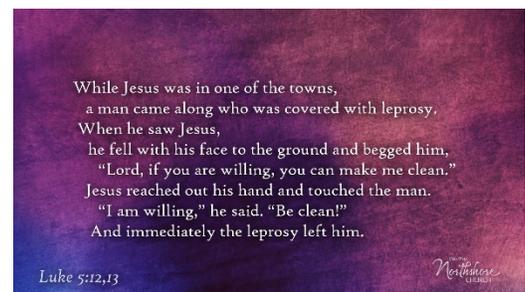


Jesus lived out this mission, first in towns throughout His home region, preaching, teaching, casting out demons, and healing... as we see in chapter 5.

Today's passage begins with:

<sup>12</sup> While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. <sup>e</sup>

While leprosy is a specific diagnosis today, in the days of Jesus *leprosy* would be understood as a whole category of skin diseases... most highly contagious, some dangerous and deadly. Some could be as innocuous as a rash that would go away in a matter of days; others (like modern-day leprosy) were chronic and could include infections that would claim flesh, like fingers and toes. Because many of these infections were so very contagious, and there were no antibiotics and such to combat them, the *ancients* took this category of disease seriously. The priests were in charge of determining who was “clean” and “unclean” which was, in large part, a matter of who was contagious.



<sup>1</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 4:18–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

So... a first thing we can notice is that this unnamed man, suffering from leprosy, was not only ill, he was a *lawbreaker*... an *illegal* if you will. Those suffering from leprosy, those determined unclean, were strictly forbidden from being around the otherwise healthy population... especially the villages, towns, and cities (have you heard of leper colonies?). The presence of this man in the town indicates that something was not right. He should not have been there; he was an outcast.

Which brings up another important point. What ever the specific diagnosis of this skin disease, it was more than a *medical* problem. It was also a social problem, and a religious problem. He was an outsider, desperate for help, looking to Jesus.

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.” <sup>2</sup>

That is an interesting choice of words. Since our passage this morning is short, we have time to get granular... to carefully consider some of the words. Technically, this desperate man was wrong about Jesus. He was right in identifying Jesus as someone who could help. He was right in addressing Jesus as **Lord**, and treating Jesus as God, falling with his face to the ground. But he was technically wrong about Jesus being able to make the man *clean*. *Clean* is more of a legal term than a medical term.

It is sort of like the baseball umpire being asked about the sometimes-subtle differences between balls and strikes; the umpire concisely summed up the difference by saying “they are what **I say** they are.” In our day with slow-motion cameras, tracer technology, and those boxes we see on our television screens, we may be led to believe that balls and strikes are a matter of *science*... precise measurement. The truth is that balls and strikes are a matter of *judgement*. The umpire is right when he says, “they are what I say they are.”

And so it was with matters of being “clean” or “unclean.” In that case, the *umpires* were the **priests**; only a priest could say that someone was clean. But Jesus could certainly deal with the underlying condition, the leprosy.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>3</sup>

Did you notice that Jesus made things worse before He made them better? The scene started with one lawbreaker and then there were two. It was just as illegal to **touch** a leper as it was for the leper to be amongst the population.

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<sup>2</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

In my way of thinking, Jesus got things out of order. If I were Jesus, I'd heal that leper first, get him cleaned up, make sure he was no longer contagious, before touching him. Jesus didn't even use any hand sanitizer.

It turns out that this is the way we often think of God, right? Most religions, and even a lot of us Christians, think that we must *clean up our act* before God will have anything to do with us. The problem is, of course, we can't sufficiently *clean up our act* to encounter God's holiness. No matter our piety, or sacrifices, or self-denial, or whatever we might try... our human efforts are insufficient. We can't be good enough.

There is only one solution, demonstrated here by Jesus; God must take the initiative. He touches us... first. We might put ourselves in a place to be touched, we might even call on Him to touch us, but the power is in His touch.

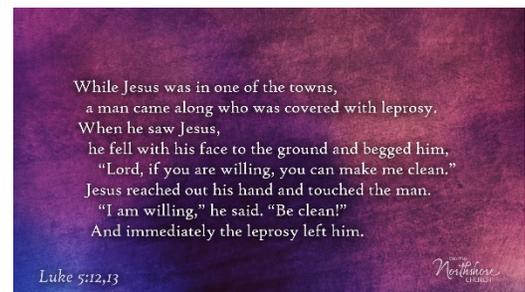
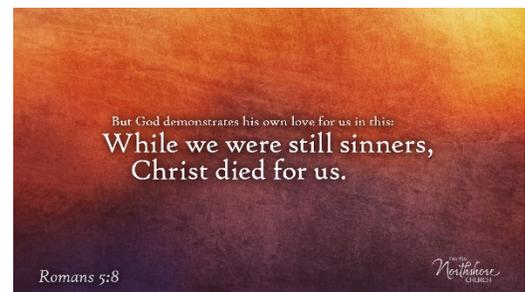
The Book of Romans puts it like this:

<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:  
**While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** <sup>4</sup>

Jesus illegally touched the leper before He was clean... just as Jesus touches us before we are clean. Jesus ***touched*** us, with His incarnation, God in human flesh, before He ***cleansed*** us with His body and blood.

He touched the leper that day, and Jesus cleansed him. Not merely calling him clean, or judging that he was no longer contagious, Jesus changed the man from being unclean to being clean. The leper said that Jesus could do it if He was willing; the now former-leper knew that Jesus was, indeed, willing.

Again, getting a bit granular with the words, notice that it says, "the leprosy ***left*** him." On a quick read, we would understand that the leper was healed. But I think Luke chose his words carefully here. Saying that the leprosy ***left*** him provides some wonderful ambiguity. The language here is more along the lines of the spiritual than the medical, as if the leprosy ***left*** the man like demons were exorcised from others by Jesus.



<sup>4</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ro 5:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I said it is wonderful ambiguity (the sort of thing a post-modern would say... I know that there are many here who don't find anything *wonderful* about ambiguity). I say *wonderful* because I don't think the ambiguity is meant to *confuse*, but rather to **comprise**... to encompass anything that was keeping this one from being freed from his captivity.

I've noticed that there are Christian folk who seem overly concerned with the *diagnosis* of things before they pray. It is not a new problem; we see it in the New Testament when His disciples would ask Jesus about the source of sickness and such. We might wonder:

- Is this a self-inflicted wound, the result of sin?
- Is this a matter of spiritual attack, the sort of thing literally caused by the devil and demons? or
- Is this just a matter of circumstances, perhaps an accident or simply a disease with no discernable cause?

When I pray, I tend not to care all that much... because I'm generally a pragmatist and know that regardless of the cause, the answer is the same: Jesus.

Was that skin disease a consequence of sin? Could have been... there are all sorts of rashes and such that one can acquire as a result of bad behavior. (Anyone have any personal examples they'd like to share?)

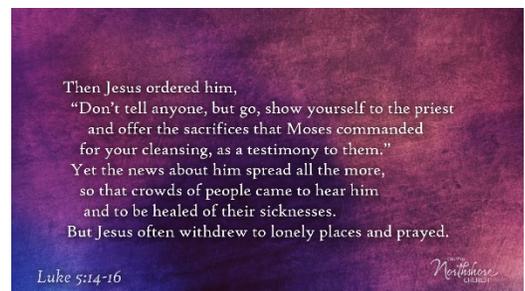
Was that skin disease a result of something demonic... and that demon needed to go? Could have been.

Or was that skin disease just that... disease, innocently contracted the same way we might catch a cold.

It doesn't matter. No matter the cause, Jesus was the answer. Jesus is the answer.

<sup>14</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

While Jesus was a *lawbreaker* when He needed to be (touching the leper), here we see Him keeping the law again by directing the former leper to comply with the decrees of Moses (the sort of stuff we find in Leviticus 13).



<sup>5</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The miracle was done, the man was returned to health and was qualified to be returned to society, but only the priests could complete the social restoration. In so doing, the miraculous healing served as a testimony to the authorities; they would see, with their own eyes, what God had done.

The teaching of the New Testament is clear; whenever possible, we should comply with governmental authorities. One of the most important reasons is spelled out here: so that they can see what God is doing for, in, and through His People. Wouldn't it be great, and shouldn't it be so, that whatever authorities we are accountable to would know that Christians are good citizens, and that when examined demonstrate what God is doing for us, in us, and through us?

Even though Jesus told the former leper to simply go about his business

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup>

This is the point of miracles, to build faith. Our testimonies about Jesus should result in people wanting to see and hear for themselves.

Finally, verse 16 closes with this:

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. <sup>7</sup>

One more *granular* focus on a word, this time **lonely**.

Is there anything worse than being lonely? I hate loneliness... not merely that people aren't present, but that people aren't *with* me, that people don't understand, that people don't care. Loneliness is awful.

It isn't really a matter of the physical presence of people. As much as I hate loneliness, I love solitude (even need regular solitude).

But solitude and loneliness are far from the same.

Loneliness is a place of vulnerability and weakness.

Solitude is a place of safety and strength.

When I'm lonely, temptation seems exponentially stronger. When I'm lonely my imagination gets powerfully negative. When I'm lonely I'm weak.

But in solitude I am recharged. In solitude, I more easily and readily sense God's leading. In solitude there is strength.

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<sup>6</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>7</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

So what was going on with Jesus? Was He lonely? Other translations don't use the word *lonely*, using words like *deserted*, *desolate*, or *wilderness*. And even the NIV that I use and have on the screen doesn't say that Jesus was lonely... but rather that He would find *lonely places*.

I'm certain that what Jesus found was **solitude**. It was in these moments of prayer that the Son of God communed with the Father and the Spirit. It was there He was recharged. It was there He best heard the voice of the Father and sensed the leading of the Spirit. It was there Jesus found strength.

Here at the end of the passage we ought to ask ourselves: *So What?*

What might we take away?

Let's consider this from the passage:  
**Alignment of Wills.**

Consider the leper's request.

he fell with his face to the ground and begged him [Jesus],  
"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."<sup>8</sup>

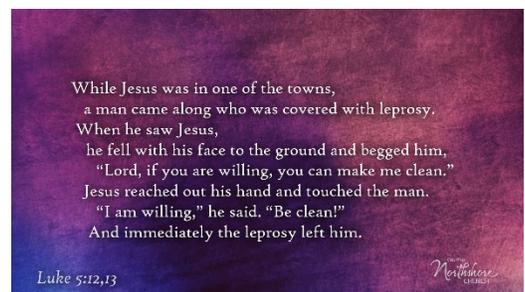
Many of you know that I was out of my usual context a few weeks ago, on a mission to Bolivia. One of the benefits of getting out of our usual contexts, whether on a trip like this or a vacation or retreat, is that we see things from a different perspective, even seeing ourselves from a different perspective.

In a conversation with a few of the other pastors on the trip I said, "I'm realizing that over the past few years my prayers have changed from being so focused on what I want and think I need, even what I think others might need. Rather than praying to move God, or convince God, or even change God... rather than praying to get God aligned with me, I'm praying to get me aligned with God."

There isn't anything wrong to ask God for answers, healing, help, provision and such... but I'm convinced that the more powerful prayer is not praying to *get God aligned with us*, but rather praying to get us aligned with God.

This was the leper's prayer... that if Jesus was willing, the leper might glorify God with a miracle.

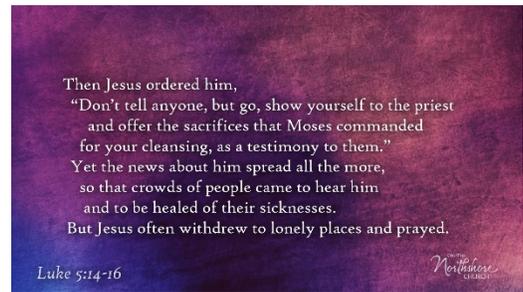
But that wasn't the only alignment going on in our passage.



<sup>8</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

In those lonely places, in solitude, Jesus aligned Himself with the Father and the Spirit.

We don't know precisely how Jesus prayed in those moments... but I suspect it was along the same lines that He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.



<sup>41</sup> He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."<sup>9</sup>

These are examples to us... that in our lives and work, that our wills would be aligned with God's Will. This is God's plan for **each** of us... and it is God's plan for all of us together as His People.

God's Will is that we all would be clean. That means believing in Jesus. Putting ourselves in a place where He can touch us. Trusting in His work. Believing Him, and responding to Him with lives that begin to live up to all He has done for us, and is doing in us and through us.

God's Will is that our wills would be aligned with His. That means prayer... prayer that is more focused on aligning our wills, our desires, our perspectives with His.

God's Will is that we would take up our role and work as the Body of Christ... reaching across boundaries, especially to the outcast, and bringing them into the Family of God.

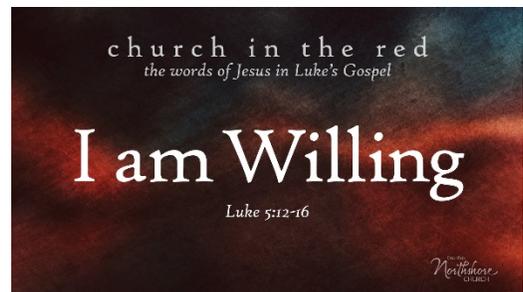
Jesus said "I am willing."

Are we willing?

Are we willing to align our wills with His?

Are we willing to let go?

- Plans
- Pain
- Aspirations
- Wrongs
- Success
- Failures
- Priorities



<sup>9</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 22:41-42). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

