

How do we see people who our society despises? How do we respond to people who might spark a reaction within us of repulsion or of naturally wanting to turn away or to walk away from?

Think of stories of those you know who have been restored and transformed by the power of God. Do you know anyone who has been physically healed?

Living it out (Application):

How might we enable those on the fringes of our society to be reintegrated, welcomed and renewed? Into our church community?

Coming Up at St Mark's

Rwanda Children's Choir. This Monday evening. St Mark's, 7.30pm

Trip to the Holy Land. March 2015. There will be a meeting at church at 7.30pm this Wednesday 30th April.

Adrian Plass and the Church weekend. Next Saturday evening. 7.30pm. Tickets from the office or on the door.



prayer

Please pray for...

Pray this slowly, pausing between phrases, allowing for responses:

A prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Pray for **Bishop Nick Baines and Bishop James Bell**, as they prepare to lead the new diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales.

Pray for the **Vision for Mission** day in Harrogate on Saturday June 14th – a feast of different types of church – and for Tim Cundy and Karin Shaw who are involved in organising it.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

This month we are praying for **Lifeline**, providing accommodation for those seeking a way out of homelessness. Pray for **Carl and Georgie Good** as they lead the organisation.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!



INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 27th April 2014

Thank you for your support of our prayer journey through Lent, for the wonderful prayer room, for your engagement with the prayer gatherings...There are two training events coming up. On **Saturday 10th May (morning only)** there will be a **Leadership Development gathering with Elaine Storkey**. Elaine is a gift to us – former President of Tearfund, Thought for the Day speaker, profound theologian...she will be giving a good amount of input on leadership, there will be worship and a reflective learning process. If you oversee any area of church or life, this will support and encourage you. Then, on **May 14th** there is our **prayer gathering (7.30)** – hope you can make it. God bless, Guy

Worship/reflection:

What has been the most significant moment for you over Lent/Easter? What do you think God would teach you through it? In this Easter season, give thanks to Jesus – for his death and resurrection. Sing or listen to a hymn that celebrates that he has risen or offer praise.

Luke 5: 12-16. Becoming bruised, hurting and dirty

Have you ever been on a train, or in a confined space where someone has been sniffing and snuffling and you see people not so subtly moving away and finding another place to sit or stand? You stay where you are though because you don't want them to feel guilty, that is, until they let out an enormous sneeze in your direction. You suddenly find yourself needing to go and check out the buffet carriage, or make a phone call somewhere (anywhere) else. In poster campaigns and TV adverts, at school and at work, we are reminded again and again of the need to be mindful of germs, to wash our hands, to steer clear of any source of contamination. We are highly aware of the importance of hygiene. We take great care in preventing the spread of infection and disease.

It should be no surprise that other generations and cultures have taken similar steps to do the same. Indeed, much of the law of the Old Testament relates to very practical guidelines for how people should live safely and securely in an imperfect world - how a community might be best set up to thrive, and be protected from threat and hazard. Leviticus 13 outlines the procedure that those with leprosy (and various skin conditions) must follow to ensure that their disease does not spread to other members of the community. This, more often than not, necessitated the sufferer to live away from the town or village in which they lived and to ensure that others knew about their uncleanness. Even by the time of the first century, in Jesus' day, this was a common circumstance, and it's the situation that the man that we read about in Luke chapter 5 found himself in. This man is covered with leprosy. He's had to live outside the community, away from friends and family, for years. He has a highly infectious disease, and there has been no one to hug him, no one to tell him that it will be okay. Other than those in a similar plight he would have no contact with others - he is an outcast. This man sees Jesus. We're not sure how he knows about him, where he's seen or heard about Jesus' works of power and healing, but it's clear that this man is desperate. He falls with his face to the ground and begs, *'Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean.'* I wonder how often we come to God like this? How we come desperate to be healed or transformed by the Lord, but are consumed by the hopelessness of our situation. We think we need to persuade God to hear us, and expect to be disappointed.

What Jesus did next is extraordinary, for his actions would have made him both ceremonially unclean (in accordance with the law already stated), but also highly prone to contract the disease itself: *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him.* What is clear in this account and throughout Luke's gospel is that a **new law** is in operation. In the established law, if someone came in to contact with an unclean person, their own status as clean would be compromised. They too would become unclean until the necessary course of action was taken, and the priest examined them and pronounced them to be clean. Priests would act as administrators of the law, and it was their job to pronounce whether a person was clean or unclean. Often, as in relation to skin diseases, this would determine whether someone would remain outside the community or be permitted to return. In the case of the leprous man, there was only one way this was going to go. He would remain outside the community, afflicted by his condition until he succumbed to its deadly effects. That is, until he encountered Jesus.

As Jesus reaches out and heals the man, Jesus' own cleanness, his own righteousness touches and 'infects' the man. He is the Great High Priest who pronounces freedom and restoration, cleansing and transformation. What is wonderful is that Jesus' healing isn't only confined to the physical condition, but to the restoration of the person as a whole. In order that the man can return to his community, Jesus directs the man - *'show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.'* Jesus not only heals the man, but enables him to be reintegrated into his society. How do we respond like Jesus to those who are despised and rejected by our society - the broken and the vulnerable? A few months ago, near the end of last year, you

might have heard the story of Vinicio Riva. Perhaps you don't recognize the name at first, but a picture of Mr Riva being kissed on the head by Pope Francis was splashed across the media. Vinicio Riva suffers from an extreme case of Neurofibromatosis. The condition causes tumours and growths to appear, disfiguring the body. Pope Francis' reaction to the man moved and inspired a lot of people, none more so than Mr Riva himself. Speaking to the Italian news magazine Panorama, Riva said: *'The thing that struck me most is that there has not been thinking about whether or not to hug me. I'm not contagious, but he did not know. But he just did it: he caressed me all over my face, and as he did I felt only love. First I kissed his hand while he, with the other hand, caressed my head and wounds. Then he drew me to him in a strong embrace, kissing my face. My head was against his chest his arms were wrapped around me. It lasted just over a minute, but to me it seemed like an eternity.'*

Pope Francis' example bears a resemblance to his namesake, St Francis. St Francis was on his way to do battle for his city. He was dressed in armour, riding upon his horse down the road to Perugia. Suddenly, there was standing in his way a leper dressed in rags. A good part of the leper's face had been eaten away by the dreaded disease. Francis bade the leper to step aside, but the man just stood there, silently. On an impulse, Francis got off his horse, went up to the leper, and gave him some money. Still, the leper did not move. Francis then took off his cape and wrapped it around the man. Still, the leper did not move. Finally, Francis took the man's head in his hands and kissed him on his rotted lips. When he got back on his horse and looked down to say good-bye to the leper, the road was empty. The leper was nowhere to be found, and Francis knew that in the leper he had encountered Jesus Christ.

So often, in the act of ministering we find ourselves being ministered to. We meet God, as we seek to reflect his love to a broken world. How do we see people who our society despises? How do we respond to people who might spark a reaction within us of repulsion or of naturally wanting to turn away or to walk away from? Do we get so wrapped up in our routines and habits that we fail to see those in need? Do we keep ourselves away from those we might consider unclean? Pope Francis challenges us to be different: *"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures."*

Of course, we cannot do it in our own strength. We cannot force compassion or guilt ourselves to act. We can only minister from the overflow of our hearts, rooted in the identity and strength that we find in God: *'Crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their illnesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'* It's striking that Jesus always ministers out of this place of prayer and reliance on his Father. If we are to reach out and touch our society, we must do the same.

Study

Read through Leviticus 13:1-17 and the passage from Luke. In what ways is Jesus establishing a *new law*? What similarities and differences can you see in the texts?