



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 15, 2009

6 Epiphany 2009

In this morning's gospel we read the familiar story of Jesus healing a leper. We have heard it so many times before that often we lose the significance of it. Leprosy in Jesus' time was a term used for all skin diseases.

Leprosy was considered highly contagious. In Leviticus, chapters 13 and 14 and Numbers, chapter 5, we find the proscriptions and prescriptions for treating and dealing with the disease of leprosy. These rules were given primarily for public health reasons, but what they ended up doing was to isolate everybody who had leprosy. The lepers were literally unclean and defiled. They were outcast from society having to live in colonies. Their future was bleak and filled with despair.

What the law also did was to make it an offense for anybody without leprosy to touch 'those people'. And so, this morning, along comes Jesus and pays absolutely no attention to those laws and taboos and does what he does.

For me, this morning, the miracle is not that Jesus healed the leper. The miracle is that he touched the leper.

Jesus touched the untouchable.

Despite what his Bible told him Jesus touched the untouchable.

Despite what his law told him he touched the untouchable.

Despite that he was a rabbi and looked upon by religious authorities he touched the untouchable.

Jesus touched the untouchable.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 15, 2009

I remember when I first came to the states and was on vacation on the coast in Georgia. I went to this old church, that may I add was not very welcoming. It could well have been the prototype of the name frozen chosen. A retired bishop of the Episcopal church was the preacher and the gospel was from Matthew and it was the passage on marriage and divorce. The bishop said he believed that any person who was divorced should remain celibate for the rest of their lives. That was his point of view, but then he went on to say how he could not possibly say that while he was a bishop because it would have offended so many people.

For him it was an untouchable. For me, although I disagree with his point of view, it was a shame that he lived a lie for so long.

That was a clear indication of how sometimes churches will not talk about, or face the issues of the untouchables for fear they may be rocking the boat or challenging a status quo.

We face issues of government decisions, we face issues in society of gambling and poverty, but often we are scared to speak out because we do not know whose sacred cow we will gore here, or whose toes we will step on there.

Yet, more importantly, in our society the church sometimes takes a blind eye or hides behind biblical references when we are faced with the people who are our modern day untouchables. People with aids, gay and lesbian people, people who are a different color to us, people who are a different race to us, people who abuse alcohol or drugs, people who are poor, smelly, ill kept, and plain just not acceptable.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 15, 2009

And then we have our own personal spiritual untouchables. Those things that in our church and in our worship we would never have anybody offend or try to change. The prayer book, the music, the way we play the music and what kind, the position of the altar.

Every one of us, when we look carefully enough, have those untouchables in our personal life or spiritual comfort. Those who we do not associate with. Those issues that concern the greater community, that we feel not so free to talk about.

And Jesus touches the untouchable. Unafraid of what may be said about him or what may be done about him.

Not afraid of saying or doing what he believed to be right.

What did Jesus do when he touched the leper? He did not comment on the leprosy that which made the man untouchable, but what Jesus did do was to show his love for the leper.

Could it be that maybe when we face the social issues, the untouchable people in our lives, or the physical spiritual securities we have, we just may be reaching out and touching more deeply the love of God?

That when we say what we believe on social issues we may agree to disagree with some but at least our voice is heard in love?

Maybe when we reach out and touch the person with aids, the gay and lesbian person, the alcoholic or the addict, the poor person, we are indeed touching one of God's children with love.

Maybe when we discover that our spiritual securities and comforts do not really matter so much, we

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 15, 2009

are beginning to reach into a deeper worship, a deeper relationship with a loving God?

Because when we face those issues and people in our lives which we deem untouchable, we are really dealing more with ourselves than we are with them.

We cannot go through life, well I suppose we can, conveniently disregarding issues and classes of people because we believe God has other intentions for his children and the world in which they live.

And before we begin to become satisfied in our judgments of others I want to finish with a poem that sums up a lot of this.

It's called 'I peeked thru heavens door'.

I was shocked, confused bewildered

As I peeked thru heavens door

Not by the beauty of it all,

by the lights and all its decor.

But it was the folks in heaven

who made me sputter and gasp

The thieves, the liars, the sinners

the alcoholics, and the trash.

There stood the kid from 7th grade

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 15, 2009

who swiped my lunch money twice

Next to him was my old neighbor

who never said anything nice

Herb who I always thought

was burning away in hell

was sitting pretty on cloud nine

looking incredibly well

I nudged Jesus, 'what's the deal

I would love to hear your take..

How'd all these sinners get up here

God you MUST have made a mistake

And whys everyone so quiet so somber, just give me a clue.'

Hush my child, said Jesus. They're all in shock

No one thought they would see you.

Amen

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com