



Episode 6: Indescribable Compassion

Leprosy was – and is – a terrible disease. In the ancient world, it was not well understood, and very greatly feared. As well as fear of contagion, it was seen as a mark of God’s disfavour, so that those who contracted it were outsiders in every sense. Leviticus 14, Numbers 12, and 2 Kings 5 give some sense of the situation of lepers in the Old Testament.

As we might expect, Jesus doesn’t react like anyone else when a leper approaches...

His compassion is so striking, so unusual, so compelling, that word about Him won’t stop spreading, even though He asks the now-healed leper to keep it to himself.

Questions for Prayer and Discussion

Some of these questions are very personal. There's no need to say anything aloud unless you're comfortable sharing it. But it is worth sharing with God in prayer...

Have you ever experienced being excluded, ignored, mistreated when you couldn't help it, like the leper? How would you feel in his situation?

The disciples are on the road with Jesus. They begin to experience the everyday hardships of such a transient life. Am I willing to put up with these sort of little burdens for Jesus' sake?

'He is the teacher, and we are students.' Am I willing to let myself be taught by God?

Peter wants to escort the other disciples: he wants to feel important; instead, Jesus directs him to go and look after his family. Do I want to do the jobs where I get seen and praised? Or am I content with the hidden, everyday jobs that I can do with and for God?

Matthew can't get his head around what he has seen. Is that how I experience God?

Jesus is 'tired after a long day of walking', but still has time to answer questions and pay attention to people. Do I give time for others, even when I don't feel like it?

Do I realise that I can turn to Jesus at any time, that He is never too tired (or too bored, or too distracted) to listen to me?

Shmuel is obviously getting the Old Testament wrong. Do you sympathise with him, though?

Nicodemus advises that we both respect tradition and be open to the unexpected. Do I manage both?

Some passages of Scripture you might find useful:

Matthew 8:1-4 When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."

Mark 2:1-12 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.” And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”