

Ready, Willing, and Able

Sterling UMC
August 15, 2010
Mark 1:40-45

I have a question for you this morning. It's an important question, a nagging question. It is a question that often crosses our minds, one that we often wonder about. Here is the question: What is God doing when we are in a bind? When the lifeboat springs a leak? When the ripcord snaps? When the last penny is spent before the last bill is paid? When the last hope left on the last train? Where is God? What is God doing?

I know what we are doing. Nibbling on our nails like corn on the cob. Pacing the floors. Lying awake at night. Taking pills. I know what we do.

But what does God do? It's a big question, real big. If God is sleeping, I'm up the creek. If he is laughing, I'm lost. If he is crossing his arms and shaking his head, then saw off the limb, Honey, it's time to crash.

What is God doing? When we hurt? When we suffer? When we cry? When we're stressed out? When we've reached the end of our rope?

I believe we begin to find an answer to this question as we look at this story of Jesus and his encounter with the leper in Mark 1. Jesus was traveling through the villages of the region of Galilee preaching, teaching, healing the sick, and driving out demons. One day as he was walking down the road a man cursed with leprosy approached Jesus. It must have been a pitiful site. This man was covered from head to toe with raw open sores that disfigured his entire appearance. He moved toward Jesus fell on his knees and begged Jesus to heal him. If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean. He changed this man's life completely. He radically transformed him. This man who faced a slow agonizing death, alienated from his family and friends, was now restored to health and subsequently reunited with his family.

In this dramatic story I believe we begin to see the answer to our question. Where is Jesus?

He stands Ready

The opening verses of this story speak so powerfully to this fact. Jesus says to his disciples, "Let us go somewhere else – to nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." Then the Scripture says he traveled through Galilee preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. In other words Jesus went about searching for those with whom he could share the good news of the Gospel, deliver from sickness and sin. That was his mission. That was what he was all about. And everywhere he went, he stood ready to fulfill that call.

This poor leper must have realized this fact because he was smart enough to seek out Jesus and beg for mercy in his awful condition. Why are we often so slow to realize this truth?

Many people I have talked to over the years have the mistaken concept of God. They believe that God is up there in heaven and he is so busy with all of his Godly

duties, like hanging the stars, keeping the planets in their orbits, seeing that the sun rises and sets each day that he doesn't have time to be bothered with the minutia of our every day lives. God doesn't care about all of the details and our petty problems are an annoyance. Or they feel that God is like an old grandfather sitting in his rocking chair on the front porch of the pearly gates and he's watching his children. He watches but he doesn't interfere. He set everything in motion and now he is tired and so he sits back and rests watching history unfold. Then there are others who only turn to God as a last resort. They struggle and fight, they try to endure and tough out whatever it they are facing, believing they can handle it in their own power and strength, only to realize that they can not. Then and only then do they turn to God for help. If that's how you feel then, I say your God is too small.

My God is always on the job. He doesn't take coffee breaks. He doesn't take a day off. He doesn't go on vacation. When you call on him you never get a busy signal. He is always there. He is never too busy to hear my prayers. He is never unconcerned, even about the minutest detail of my life. He stands constantly ready to hear my calls for help, my plea for forgiveness, my appeals for guidance and direction. He is ever ready. He is not tired or simply. My God is involved. Actively seeking, searching, pursuing us with his mercy and his grace, yearning for me to call on him first instead of last. All I must do, all you need do is call out to him and without fail he is there. In fact, the Bible says that he even knows our requests, our desires, and our needs, before we ask. What a comfort that is. And to top it off he says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." "I will be with you always." What an assurance that is to know that we have a God who stands ever ready.

He stands ready and willing

The leper in this story had a hard time believing that Jesus would be willing to touch him and heal him. He came to Jesus and begged him on his knees. "If you are willing, you can make me clean." "If you are willing." He did not doubt that Jesus had the power to heal him and to make him clean, but he was not sure the Master was willing to heal him.

This poor man was afflicted with the dreaded disease of leprosy. I don't need to go into an explanation of this dreadful disease. For our purposes it is enough to understand that people of Jesus' time were as fearful of leprosy as is true of AIDS today. What we see here is that Jesus didn't turn this poor man away. There were strict laws, which ordained that he should not even speak to Jesus. But Jesus ignored such a sad rule and did something that no one else would have ever considered doing. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, "I am willing." He cared. He shows us that the real value of a person is inside, not outside. He shows us that no person is too disgusting for God's touch. No person is too sinful to receive his forgiveness. He shows us that He loves us even at our very worst, that his love reaches out and embraces us when we are utterly unlovable. He is always willing.

The Bible says it is not his will that any should perish. It says he is willing that all men be saved. John 10:10 tells us his will. Jesus says, "I have come that you may have life, and that more abundantly." "Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." People need help, and our Lord is in the help-giving business. He came not to be ministered to but to minister. People everywhere need Jesus. I

need him, my family needs him, you need him. Every single person in this room needs him, and there are countless people outside these four walls that need him. When Jesus began his ministry he stood up in the temple and read from the prophet Isaiah, "I have come to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." If that doesn't convince us of his willingness nothing will.

Theologian and author Leslie Weatherhead once said that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God must finally say, "Then thy will be done." In other words, God wills to forgive us, redeem us, and make us whole – all of us – only we can miss out by turning from God.

God is ready. He is willing. And the best news of all is that God is able.

Jesus is able to meet our greatest needs. He has the power. There is no power he cannot conquer, no circumstance he cannot overcome, no disease he cannot heal, no problem he cannot solve. He is able, more than able.

But there are many who don't truly believe this. They go through life suffering, because they have the mistaken notion that somehow their situation is too difficult even for God to handle. They say, "All of this is fine and dandy for someone else, but you don't know my problem. You don't know my pain. You don't know what I face."

Well if that's how you feel, then consider this:

You think you're in a tough spot and that things are so hopeless not even God can deliver you? Ask Moses. He led his people out of slavery and as they escaped they found themselves in a tight spot. They were backed up against the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army was breathing down their necks ready to slaughter them, but God provided a way out. Moses raised his staff and the sea parted and God's people walked through on dry ground and Pharaoh's army was swallowed by the sea. God is able.

You think God doesn't have the power to guide you through a time of wandering and uncertainty? Ask the Israelites. For forty years he guided them as they wandered through the wilderness. He gave them manna to eat and water from a rock. He protected them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God is able.

You think that you've disappointed God so deeply and so many times that there is no way he could ever give you another chance? Ask Peter. Peter, the one Jesus called the Rock, the one who said he would never deny Jesus, not only denied him three times but cursed and swore saying, "I do not know this man." And yet after his resurrection, there is Jesus at the seashore offering Peter forgiveness, another chance, and the power of the Holy Spirit. God is able!

You think you're too bad even to receive God's grace? Ask the thief hanging on the cross beside Jesus. He deserved to die for his crimes, and yet as he hung there waiting to die, he called out, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus raised his bloodstained head and said, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." God is able!

You think you're too ugly, too sinful, too sick, too disgusting for the Lord to care about you? Ask the leper in our story this morning. Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, and it says, immediately, the leprosy left him and he was clean. The power of Jesus Christ flowed through the man's body, through that man's life and he was made whole. Jesus did it. He was ready, willing, and able to heal him.

And if he can do it for Moses and the Israelites, if he is able to do it for Peter and the thief on the cross, if he is able to do it for this lonely leper, then my friends, he is more than able to do it for me and for you.

So what do you think? What is the answer to the question? What does God do when we are in a bind? If this encounter with this lowly leper is any indication, that question can be answered with three words: Our God stands READY, WILLING, and ABLE to intervene on our behalf. He fights for us. He steps into the ring and points to our corner and takes over. His job is to fight. Our job is to trust. Just trust. Not direct or question, or yank the steering wheel out of his hands. Our job is to pray and wait. Nothing more is necessary. Nothing more is needed. Because our God is ready, willing, and able.