

Jesus Is Willing!

A sermon based on Mark 1:40-45.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's one of the most epic love ballads of the 1990's. Anyone care to venture a guess? Meatloaf's "I Would Do Anything for Love." I once read an article, trying to get to the bottom of the most commonly asked question when listening to that song...what is the "that" he WOULDN'T do for love?

Now, if you look closely enough at the lyrics, you'd see a few things he wouldn't do. The article interviewing him, though, had a little bit of fun with that question, asking Meatloaf about things like, "Would you go vegan?" "Would you record a duet with Justin Bieber?" "Would you take a bullet?" You know, tough, mostly nonsensical and hypothetical questions (and he finally revealed he probably wouldn't give up P.F. Chang's lettuce wraps, since he eats those after most of his gigs).

Well, with Valentine's Day being this past week, I thought I'd ask, what wouldn't you be willing to do to show your loved one how much you love them? Guys, cook your gals a tasty three course meal? Buy them flowers? Get all dressed up to take her out to dinner? Offer to watch the kids so you could go get a massage, a haircut, or just do the shopping in peace? Even if it's just for that one special day, usually we're willing to go to the back of the "love" closet, clear out the mothballs, shake out the true love that hasn't been used in about a year and do something special for our loved ones.

So, again, what wouldn't you do for love? Today, Jesus answers that question for you and me in the way he deals with a certain man, an outcast, someone who's unclean. He's willing to do whatever it takes to save.

And the same is true for us. We've done and do some pretty despicable and gross and nasty and unclean things (sin). We test Jesus and his love on a daily basis. And still, in spite of that, Jesus is willing. He's willing to love us. He's willing to touch us. He's willing to make us clean. And as a result, now we're willing to do the right thing and take our love for God and all he's done for us to the streets and spread it.

So, Jesus found himself in a situation not too many people of his day would have cared to be in, face to face with a man who had leprosy, or as the word here in the Greek indicates, some sort of serious disease affecting the skin. Now, if you've never seen leprosy before, think painless ulcers covering the body, flat, pale areas of skin, possible loss of fingers, skin nodules, potential facial disfigurement.

And it wasn't so much the ugly features of this disease that repelled so many people of Jesus' day from lepers (the Jews actually had laws in place requiring people with leprosy to maintain a certain distance from the "healthy"). But, that disease was believed to be highly contagious. So who here would have liked to be in Jesus' shoes? I didn't think so. I mean, the kid starts sniffing and you pretty much throw on the hazmat suit or whisk your children away and put them into quarantine.

But there Jesus was, as the man fell to his knees and begged him, ***"If you are willing, you can make me clean."*** No self-entitled demands, but a simple and heartfelt request with the trust Jesus could cure him.

And we see here how far Jesus' love would go. Now, I think the new NIV translation of verse 41 you have in the worship folders here is not good at all. It says Jesus' response was "indignant," which is what you might have expected from anyone else in that situation...to be annoyed and a bit perturbed this unclean man would be gutsy enough to approach the "clean." But that's not at all what the Greek is getting at...and that's not at all who Jesus was. A much better translation would be what the original NIV has, that Jesus was **"filled with compassion."**

The pitiful condition of the man filled Jesus with compassion. The Greek word here indicates this was a "gut-wrenching" experience for our Lord. His heart went out to the man. That's compassion...something I'm sure you've experienced before. And so, a man most wouldn't have even given the time of day to, Jesus saw his faith in God, and in his compassion, he said, **"I am willing. Be clean."** And he healed him.

It was a couple of months before the presidential election last year when Hillary Clinton made her infamous remarks: **"We are living in a volatile political environment. You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic -- you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that...Now, some of those folks -- they are irredeemable, but thankfully they are not America."**

I wonder if maybe that was one of the major turning points in the presidential election campaigning. I mean, if you were a Trump supporter, how did that make you feel? That someone who wants to be your president also considers you to be deplorable, appalling, pathetic, irredeemable, un-American?

Yeah, being called that certainly hurt a lot of people (maybe even you), but what if that's what you truly were? If no one liked you, no one ever wanted to be around you, and you were a literal outcast to society?

I'm sure this man with leprosy knew what that was like. He certainly fit into a basket of what we would call deplorables...appalling, pitiful, wretched, pathetic.

Would you be surprised if I told you that you are in that basket as well? Because you and I all are. We are deplorable. To others in this world, you and I are deplorable.

We're the church who still teaches that, while we love homosexuals, we're not afraid to tell them their lifestyle is still sinful...you're the believer who still believes that.

We're the church who still look at two people who are living together outside of marriage and say, that's not keeping the marriage bed pure or fleeing from sexual immorality as God tells us to...you're still the believers who believes that.

We're the church who still asserts God's choice for pregnant women is to keep that life inside their womb alive instead of killing that baby through abortion...you're still the believer who believes that.

We're the church who still holds up the entire Bible, all of it, as the timeless truth and unchanging words of God and says this still dictates our moral living, instead of changing our teachings to fit the moods or trends of the day...you're still the believer who believes that.

And that makes you deplorable, doesn't it. And unpopular. And outsiders to so many others in the world.

But more than that, you and I are deplorable to God. Because, though we agree, God's Word still dictates our moral living, we still don't always follow it.

God says, ***"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths...do not grieve the Holy Spirit."*** But the cursing, the gossip, the hurtful words you speak to your spouse or friend or co-worker or child, the way you talk about the opposite sex, the way you talk about sex, the words you speak through your fingers when you're on social media or when you compose an argumentative or angry email, feeling like you can hide behind your computer screen, that makes you deplorable.

God says, ***"You must no longer live as the Gentiles (as unbelievers) do...separated from the life of God."*** Would you be able to say, from the moment you wake up to the moment your eyes close at night, you've done that? The thoughts going through your head when your spouse nags you...again? What you do when its 35 below and your car won't start? When you open the doctor's bill and see the cost for a simple walk-in visit? The kind of music you listen to? The kind of movies you've grown more comfortable watching or letting your children watch? Would you fit in the basket there?

Or, as Jesus showed here, how we can and should show love and compassion to even the "outcasts" in society. I can tell you how distrustful I am of the people I see standing on the street corners in town. How easy is it for you to spend a few extra bucks on canned good when we have a food drive here? Is it a bother to cook up a pasta dish for another member when you hear about the rough patch their going through?

You know, according to the Jewish laws, people who had leprosy would have had to walk around, shouting "Unclean," especially when others were approaching. What if you did, too, for every uncleanness of sin you have? "I'm lazy." "I'm selfish." "I lust." "I don't really care about this person." "I'm just going through the motions." "I'm a hypocrite." "I'm unclean." "I'm a deplorable." It would be embarrassing to display our sins like that.

But we don't have to say it. God sees it. And, to take off of Hillary's comments, for our uncleanness, and as a basket of deplorables to God, we ought to be irredeemable, and not that we aren't America...but we aren't always acting like citizens of heaven, Christians, and for that, we ought to be outcasts from God's presence for good.

And, as deplorables, what else can we do but fall to our knees, with true sorrow over our sins, confess those sins at the feet of Jesus, and with repentance in our hearts humbly say, "Jesus, if you are willing, you can make me clean!"

And brothers and sisters in Christ, lift up your heads and hear the words of your compassionate Savior, ***"I am willing! Be clean!"***

Don't lose sight of how incredible those simple words are...that Jesus is willing. He didn't have to. Jesus didn't have to come and save us, but he did. He didn't have to become a man and associate with us unclean sinners but he did...and perfectly. He didn't have to offer his perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross and endure God's wrath in hell to pay for our sins, but he did, selflessly.

And the best part is, he was willing. He wanted to. Don't be deceived by his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he asked God to take the cup from him and prayed, ***"yet not as I will, but as you will."*** It was always in his heart to live and die and rise for you and me to save us. That's his compassion, his love, his mercy, his grace...that he was willing to that far, to those lengths, in order to make us clean.

Think about this: in Jesus' day, the only thing worse than touching a leper was touching a dead person. A commentary on those times says, **"No one was even to salute (the leper); ... No less a distance than six feet must be kept from a leper. Rabbi Meir would not eat an egg purchased in a street where there was a leper. Another rabbi boasted that he always threw stones at them to keep them far off, while others hid themselves or ran away."** And what did Jesus do? In compassion, he touched the leper and healed him.

Friends, think about what will happen here in a few minutes. Many of you, having properly prepared yourselves, will come, bringing your unclean lives and deplorable sins before this altar, and what happens? Jesus touches you. The bread, his body, the same body bruised and beaten and crucified, the perfect Lamb offered as a sacrifice for your sins, that body touches your lips. And then the wine, his blood, the same blood that flowed from his body, from his thorn-crowned head, from his whipped and scourged body, flowing from his pierced side, the innocent blood shed for you (because, as Scriptures says, ***"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"***), that blood touches your lips. And you are clean....because Jesus was willing to live, die, and rise for you.

Jesus was willing to come to you and make you clean when you weren't able to come to him because you were unclean.

And now clean, what will you do? What did the former leper do?

He sinned. Did you get that here? Jesus told him to go show himself to the priests and offer a sacrifice for his cleansing and to not tell anyone else about what had happened. In his well-intentioned disobedience, the man decided to share the good news of Jesus' love instead. Huh!

Jesus hasn't set those restrictions on you. Quite the opposite. Jesus loves it when you and I show true compassion and share his love and spread the gospel throughout our neighborhoods and communities.

What are you willing to do for Jesus? I think that sounds like a pretty good and God-pleasing goal there! And wouldn't you know (shameless plug!), we'll be having a Friendship Sunday in less than a month, a great opportunity to share the love of Christ by inviting someone to come and see him here and be touched by his love here!

What are you willing to do for love? Jesus was willing to touch and clean this basket of deplorables. It doesn't get much better than that. But we'll try as we go out, unbridled, thankful for his cleansing touch, eager to share his love and touch the lives of others with his love today, tomorrow, every day. Amen.