

He Touched Me!
By Mel Hathaway
Mark 1: 40 – 45
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I. Introduction

A. It is good to be here with you this morning

1. Dottie and I are enjoying the opportunity to get acquainted
 - a. With as many of you as possible
2. Please don't expect me to remember your names after meeting you once
 - a. Some people seem to have a knack for that – I'm not one of those people
3. I'm at that awkward age – too old to blame my faults on youthful inexperience
 - a. And still too young to blame my forgetfulness on old age
4. Anyway, don't be afraid to tell me your name several times
 - a. Correct me if I call you by someone else's name, and we'll get along just fine

II. I've chosen the title for this message from a part of the text that I want to focus on –

A. He touched me!

1. Isn't it interesting how one little phrase can have such a variety of meanings

A. "He touched me" – can't you just hear a couple of kids riding in the back seat

1. Mom! He touched me! Did not! Did, too! You touched me first!

A. Or perhaps some of us will remember a time when you were with that special someone

1. And your hands accidentally brushed together
 - a. And a voice inside of you shouts – Whoa, she touched me!

A. The touch mentioned in our scripture text today

1. Was certainly just as meaningful, but in a totally different way
 - a. When Jesus reached out with his hand and touched an unclean leper

A. He didn't need to touch the man in order to heal his leprosy

1. But I'm quite sure it was more than just an accident

A. What do you suppose was communicated in that touch?

1. What message do you think that healed man took with him
 - a. When he thought back to his brief encounter with Jesus and remembered
(1) Hey, he touched me!

A. Have you ever felt a deep longing for someone to care about you/your situation

1. Have you ever experienced the touch of a hand that said somebody cared?

A. As you think about your experience with meeting and learning to know Jesus

1. Can you say, along with the healed leper – “He touched me!”

III. The story in our scripture passage today seems to have been a significant event

A. In the early part of Jesus’ preaching and healing ministry

1. It’s mentioned in Matthew and Luke, too

A. This leper was not the first person Jesus healed, and he would not be the last

1. The story of the one leper out of ten who came back to thank Jesus

a. Is perhaps the more familiar story than this one for many of us

A. But it is in this text that we find Jesus doing something even more surprising perhaps

1. Than the obvious miracle of instantaneous healing

a. At least, it would likely have been very surprising to his disciples

(1) And anyone else who happened to be around

A. There were other cases where the gospel writers tell us

1. That Jesus laid his hands on the sick and they were healed

a. But in this particular case, everyone knew that nobody touches a leper

A. In the OT law given to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai

1. Persons with leprosy were declared to be unclean

A. Anyone who made accidental contact with a leper was also considered unclean

1. And they had to undergo a lengthy and laborious cleansing ritual

a. Before they could engage in normal activities again

A. There was no such cleansing ritual available for the lepers themselves

1. Their disease was considered to be untreatable and incurable

a. Although a number of different skin afflictions might be labeled as leprosy

2. And once in a while, the condition would disappear on its own

A. The Mosaic law made allowances for that, and the priests were given the thankless task

1. Of inspecting any such claims of healing from leprosy

a. Only when they said it was true could a leper return to normal life again

A. I said “return to normal life” because, once a person was diagnosed with leprosy

1. Their life became a living hell

A. The symptoms were bad enough, and could include itching and pain

1. Skin literally rotting, toes and fingers dropping off

a. A person with long-term leprosy in those days was not a pretty sight to see

A. But even worse than the physical symptoms, for these poor souls

1. Was the way they were treated by society, even by family and friends

- a. At least, for those who developed into the latter stages of the disease
- A. Not only were they declared ceremonially unclean, but everyone knew
 - 1. Or thought that they knew, a person with leprosy must have committed a great sin
 - a. For God to punish them so severely
 - 2. So there was little sympathy expressed for a leper
- A. They were required by law to live outside the towns or villages, or the city gates
 - 1. And they were required to warn anyone who approached them of their leprosy
 - a. Knowing, even as they called out the awful words – Unclean, unclean!
 - (1) That the response would be fear, loathing, and disgust at best
 - b. And sometimes downright cruelty and insults on a really bad day
 - 2. In Jewish society, these people were treated as the very lowest class of outcasts
- A. But what was even worse than all that, they lived every day with the knowledge
 - 1. That they would likely never be able to live a normal life again
- A. Never be allowed to carry on a normal conversation, join the family for supper
 - 1. Or engage in any meaningful work or occupation
- A. Their only source of sustenance came from begging or scrounging through trash
 - 1. They could never go near the synagogue or any other place where people gathered
 - a. They could never go near their children, or ever hold a grandchild
 - 2. Never feel the warmth of or an embrace... not even so much as a touch!
- A. We might not think so much about that last part, but try going without all human contact
 - 1. Even for a few days, and see if you don't start missing it pretty quick
 - a. On the other hand, don't try that – I don't want to be accused of suggesting
 - (1) Something that might cause harm to any relationship here this morning
- A. I'm told that babies can actually be affected physically as well as mentally
 - 1. By a lack of human touch in the first weeks or months after they are born
 - a. We seem to be born with a need for that kind of physical connection
- A. And I believe that the awareness that you might never again experience
 - 1. Such a common human gesture as a handshake, a pat on the back
 - a. A hug from someone who cares, or even rubbing shoulders with a stranger
 - 2. To think that you could never get that close to anyone for the rest of your life
 - a. Would be about the worst affliction one could imagine
- A. That's why I think the gospel writers noted, with some amazement
 - 1. That when this particular leper approached Jesus that day

- a. Begging to be healed of his terrible disease, that Jesus touched him
- A. We should also note the amazing expression of faith on the part of this man with leprosy
 - 1. If you choose, you can make me clean!
 - a. There seems to have been no doubt in his mind about Jesus' ability to heal him
 - 2. The only question is – does Jesus want to do this for me?
- A. After the way he has been treated by everyone else around him
 - 1. It's no wonder that he didn't feel worthy of Jesus' help or compassion
- A. But Mark notes that Jesus was immediately moved with pity for this man
 - 1. Pity is a rare commodity in our world today, as it probably was back then
 - a. We may feel sympathy toward someone who is going through a tough time
 - 2. Or people whose lives have been touched by health crisis or natural disaster
 - a. But the condition of this leper was truly pitiful
- A. This man was living a miserable life, but unlike Joe, in our drama
 - 1. There was absolutely nothing he could do about it, except beg for mercy
 - a. He had the faith to ask, and Jesus was moved to show compassion
- A. Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand... and touched the leper
 - 1. I do choose, he says. Be made clean!
 - a. And Mark records that instantly the leprosy left him, and he was made clean
- A. Can you imagine what that must have been like for this man who came to Jesus
 - 1. Hoping against hope perhaps that Jesus would be willing to heal him
 - a. Hardly daring to think it might be possible – and all of a sudden it is!
- A. He, who has been ostracized and outcast from every other human being
 - 1. With the possible exception of other persons with leprosy just like him
 - a. Has been restored to full and complete health again – just like that!
- A. He must barely have heard Jesus word's to him –
 - 1. Go and show the priest, make the necessary sacrifice, be declared officially clean
 - a. But don't you tell anyone what has happened to you, or how it happened
- A. Some of you may know the gospel song that was popular a few years back
 - 1. You may even have thought of it when you read the title of the sermon today –
 - a. "He touched me" oh, he touched me. And oh, the joy that floods my soul
 - 2. Something beautiful happened, and now I know
 - a. He touched me and made me whole
- A. With joy flooding through his soul, and spilling out over the top

1. This healed leper went out, shouting the news that was just too good to keep inside
 - a. He touched me!! I'm healed! Jesus touched me and now I am clean!
 - A. And Mark says the news spread so that Jesus could not go into the towns to preach
 1. Instead, he stayed out in the country, and people came to him from all over -
 - A. Because of the healing, yes!
 1. But perhaps just as importantly, because they realized that Jesus cared
 - a. Cared enough to reach out in pity and touch a leper
 2. Cared enough to show compassion to one the world would have passed by
 - a. Cared enough to touch someone who was untouchable
- IV. There's an obvious point to this story, and perhaps another point that is less obvious
- A. Let's start with the reason Mark most likely had in mind for including this incident
 1. In his gospel, the good news about Jesus, the Messiah
 - A. The miracle of healing was one more piece of evidence that Jesus was more
 1. Than just an ordinary man
 - A. Only God could do such a thing, so clearly God was at work in this man, Jesus
 1. If God was directing the actions of this kind, compassionate Jesus
 - a. Then there is hope for others in need of healing
 - A. And every person born into this world, except for Jesus, is in need of healing
 1. By the end of Mark's gospel we will hear the amazing news that Jesus
 - a. Has made it possible for sinners to be healed from their sinful condition, too
 - A. And this story of a healed leper is a perfect example of what it is like
 1. To have a miserable, terminal illness that causes uncleanness and separation
 - a. Just as sin causes heartache, pain and misery here in this world
 2. And broken relationships and separation from God forever
 - A. If there is a condition that is worse than the condition of this man with leprosy
 1. It's the condition that every one of us inherits at birth – ugly, disfiguring, sin
 - A. Mark wants his readers to know that a compassionate God doesn't turn away from us
 1. Even though our sinful nature makes us untouchable by God's standards
 - a. God has done everything necessary to reach out to us
 2. God is not only able to save us from sin, he is ready and willing
 - a. All we need to do is ask, believe and receive healing and salvation
 - A. And when we have received God's love and mercy and forgiveness
 1. When we have been touched by Jesus and we are healed

- a. The next step, and perhaps the less obvious point of this story
 - (1) Is that we are to become like Jesus – think about it!
- A. God may want to work through you or through me to provide healing for others
 - 1. I know, God is also using doctors and nurses to do that today
 - a. And I in no way want to play down the importance of the medical profession
 - (1) After all, my wife has been involved in that profession all her life
 - b. A compassionate doctor, unlike Dr. Morebucks, can be used to bring healing
 - (1) Even when they may not give God credit for their healing touch
- A. But I also believe that God still works at times through miraculous healing
 - 1. For both physical and spiritual sickness
 - a. And oftentimes, God works through ordinary human beings
 - 2. To provide the compassionate, caring touch that brings healing
- A. And even if God doesn't choose to use you or me to provide physical healing
 - 1. I believe there are other ways that the spirit of Jesus' pity and compassion
 - a. Can, and should be, seen in the way we view our world
 - 2. Especially the way we look at those persons who are the outcasts in our society
 - a. Those, who for a variety of reasons, we may think of as "untouchable"
 - (1) Or those that we might never expect to enter the doors of our church
- A. Who is it, that you and I look at today, and because of their condition
 - 1. Whether physical or emotional, or because they seemingly have rejected God
 - a. We think of them as untouchable, unclean
 - 2. Persons to stay away from, beyond our help
 - a. And likely in the shape they are in because of bad choices they have made
- A. Many of those persons will never come to us asking for healing or help
 - 1. Perhaps because they have never experienced the compassion of Jesus before
- A. And we are not the ones who can heal them – physically or spiritually
 - 1. All we can do is reach out to them with true compassion
 - a. And along with this leper who was healed, say to those who are still in need
 - 2. Hey, come with me, I know someone who can heal you
 - a. I know, because he healed me
 - (1) He touched me!