

Epiphany 6B, 2012

Text: Mark 1:40-45

Title: Mean Jesus?

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Last week we got to know the nice guy Jesus. The patient, easy-going Jesus. The Jesus who is willing to heal anyone and everyone who comes knocking at His door. Jesus stayed up late into the night taking care of everyone's needs. The Jesus who doesn't seem to mind when His prayer time is interrupted. The Jesus who was happy, excited to keep preaching, to keep healing and casting out demons. This was the nice guy Jesus.

But today's Jesus is a little different. Today's Jesus seems to have a little bit of an attitude to him, a little bit of an edge. Yes, He has compassion on the man with leprosy. Yes, He touches him, He heals him, and He makes him clean and whole once more. Jesus does everything you'd expect Him to.

But then, Jesus gets a little short with the man. He gets stern with him. He doesn't act like nice guy Jesus. Listen to what happens after the healing.

First, it says that Jesus "sternly charged him." This is a strong word, a harsh word. It's the sort of thing that parents do with unruly children, when they get on your last nerve and you're giving them one last warning before they're in trouble. It's the sort of thing that school teachers do when the kids are getting out of line. This is the finger wagging Jesus. "Now don't you do this..."

Then, it says that Jesus "sent him away at once." Literally, it says that Jesus "cast him out." This is the same word for what Jesus does when He casts out demons. Jesus is kicking him out, throwing him out of His presence. Jesus is getting rid of this man. Again, this seems awfully strange behavior for Jesus.

Finally, Jesus tells the man not to say anything about what has happened. "Don't say nothing to nobody, just do what you've gotta do with the priests."

Jesus sternly warns him, He throws him out, and He tells him keep it zipped.

Why would Jesus act this way? Why would He be so strict and harsh with this man? You'd think He would want him to stick around. After all, Jesus has just healed him from leprosy, a deadly crippling disease. This sort of thing hadn't happened since the Old Testament, in the days of Elisha and Naaman.

You'd think Jesus would want this man as a witness to testify about what He had done, his new spokesman. You'd think He might even invite this fellow to be a disciple. Who better to tell other people about Jesus?

Instead, Jesus tries to get rid of Him as quickly as possible, and He tells him not to talk at all about what has just happened. It almost seems like Jesus regretted even healing this man.

Here's why.

Look at what happens when this man disobeys Jesus, when he does exactly what Jesus tells him not to do.

This man not only can't keep his mouth shut, he doesn't just let it slip to a few close friends that Jesus has healed him, he's practically shouting it from the rooftops. It says that he began to "talk freely about it" and "to spread the news." Literally, it says that he was preaching. He was doing the same thing that Jesus was doing. He was preaching.

First, this is a problem because He wasn't sent to preach. Jesus never authorized Him to preach. Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, but only after they had been taught and with special instructions. They were authorized to speak for Jesus, to forgive sins, to heal and to cast out demons.

But not this man. He wasn't prepared, he wasn't sent, he just went out on his own. Plenty of people these days just get up and preach because they feel like it. They just decide it's something they should do.

Jesus, however, provides preaches, whom He specifically sends. He calls men through the church and through the laying on of hands to be His representatives, to forgive sins and to proclaim the good news.

This is for your good, so that you don't have to wonder about who to listen to. You can know for sure that when a pastor who has been called by the church and ordained, He is sent by Jesus Christ and speaks for Him, that your sins are truly forgiven, just as if Jesus Christ Himself were standing here.

So the first problem is that he wasn't sent. The second problem is with his message. This man wasn't preaching the same thing as Jesus preached, when Jesus went from town to town preaching in the synagogues.

What did Jesus preach? "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand."

What did this man preach? "I've been healed by that guy."

Jesus did not want to be known merely as a miracle man. That's not why He came. He came to preach repentance and forgiveness. He came to preach of God's grace and mercy for all, of eternal life, and not just physical healing.

Unfortunately, Jesus became known primarily as a healer, as a miracle man.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem and was arrested, everyone knew Him as a miracle man. When they brought Jesus before King Herod, Herod wanted him to perform for him, to do a miracle or a trick. When Jesus was dying on the cross, the people mocked Him saying, “He saved others, but He cannot save Himself. Come on Jesus, do another miracle.”

Too often we preach the wrong kind of Jesus. We preach a Jesus who can solve all your problems. Believe in Jesus and all your problems will be solved. If you need a job, if you need healing, if you need any sort of blessing, just pray and believe and it will be yours.

That sort of message certainly draws a crowd. Jesus couldn't go anywhere because He was being mobbed. The paparazzi wouldn't leave Him alone.

But that wasn't Jesus' message. Jesus had much bigger, better things to do than just heal a few diseases. Jesus came to bring forgiveness of sins and eternal life to the whole world.

When you talk to people about Jesus, when you invite them to join you for church, talk about what really matters. Don't say things like, “You'll feel better when you come,” or “You'll make some new friends,” or “You'll learn some interesting things.” Get to the point. Talk about things the way that Jesus does. Jesus comes to forgive your sins and give you eternal life. That's what really mattered.

Yes, this leper's life was changed. Yes, it was a great blessing to be healed. But he was still a sinner. And he still died. What he needed most of all was to know Jesus not as a miracle man, but as His Savior.

We will make mistakes along the way. We will talk when Jesus wants us to be silent. And we will be silent when He wants us to talk. We will say the wrong thing and get the message mixed up sometimes.

But the good news is that Jesus still loves and cares for you.

Jesus healed this man, knowing what a mess he would make of things. Jesus knew that he would disobey Him. Jesus knew that He would get in the way and make things more difficult for Him.

But Jesus still healed him. Jesus still had compassion on him. Jesus still cleansed him from his leprosy.

And it will be the same with you. Jesus knows that you'll make a mess of things, but He still has compassion on you. He still hears your prayers. He still gives you His rich, undeserved blessings.