**Jesus–the only complete health worker**

Text: Mark 1:35-2:12

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 35:1-10; Mark 1:35-2:12

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 30, 103, 444, PH379, 525

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#5)

**Theme:** As the increasingly large crowds threaten to overwhelm the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee, he withdraws and then keeps moving from town to town, healing a leper, forgiving the sins of a paralysed man and enabling him to walk again.

**Proposition:** Jesus is the only complete health worker, fully restoring body and soul.

**Introduction**

Our health care system in New Zealand is coming under increasing pressure as our population ages and continues to grow in size through immigration. It is clear from Mark’s gospel that there was a widespread public health crisis when Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee. There were many sick people, and few, if any, healers. After Jesus cast out of an unclean spirit from an afflicted man in the Capernaum synagogue His fame spread throughout the surrounding region (1:28).

He was a very busy ‘health care worker’, ‘*healing many who were sick with various diseases and casting out many demons*’ (1:34). We know today many medical staff have suffered high levels of fatigue and burnout. They need rest. In order to get some relief from the pressure of the crowds, Jesus went away early in the morning to be alone and to pray (1:35). Christ, the perfect man, needed to practice what we would today call ‘self-care’ in order to continue to serve others.

Jesus went ‘*throughout all Galilee*’ (1:39) as he continued to heal people and to cast out demons. He has the ability to deliver something people desperately needed then and still need now – good health. Being unwell at times is something that we accept as a normal and expected part of life. Most of us have a supply of basic medicines like Panadol and Aspirin in our homes. Some will also have prescription medicines. Most, if not all, of us are enrolled with a local doctor (a GP). Did you know that in the Roman Empire, a network of hospitals was established, initially to care for the large army? However, outlying parts of the empire, like Palestine had very few well-trained doctors to treat the ill.

The importance of medical professionals was confirmed by Jesus when He said, ‘*Those who are well have no need of a physician*’ (Mark 2:17). Mark records the case of a woman who had ‘*suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse*’ (Mark 5:26). Seeing the doctor back then was expensive and often resulted in treatments that were damaging to health rather than being therapeutic. There were very limited means in Bible times for the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. Any understanding of human anatomy and physiology was very limited. No one knew about bacteria and viruses.

The sheer number of people who flocked to Jesus in Galilee shows how widespread the health care crisis was there. Yet this was not unique to that place and time. Ill health, sickness and disease have plagued mankind since the fall of Adam and Eve. Ultimately, in a general sense, the existence of sickness in the world is the overall consequence of mankind’s rebellion against God and His ongoing curse on creation (Rom 8:20-21). At times sickness in an individual person may be a result of their own sin (e.g. 1 Cor 11:30) but is often completely unrelated to any of their failures to obey God’s good law (e.g. John 9:3).

In the face of pain and life-threatening ailments, we wisely seek help to relieve our suffering. That’s what the Galileans did when they heard about Jesus and came to him ‘from every quarter’ (Mark 1:45). We’re going to look at the work of Jesus from our text under three headings:

1. A public ministry for the isolated sick
2. A public ministry for the immobile
3. A public ministry for the sinful
4. **A public ministry for the isolated sick**

The Kalaupapa peninsula is located in a remote area of Molokai Island in Hawaii, at the base of a high wall and surrounded by ocean on three sides. In 1865 the Kingdom of Hawaii passed “*an act to prevent the spread of leprosy*’ and the Kalaupapa peninsula became an isolated leper colony where many people were forced to live out their lives, at first with little help. You may know about Father Damien, a Roman Catholic priest who ministered to the lepers there from 1873. He cared for the sick and established leaders within the community to build houses, schools, roads, hospitals, and churches. He dressed residents' ulcers, built a reservoir, made coffins, eat with the lepers and providing them with medical and emotional support. After eleven years of service he contracted leprosy. He continued with his work despite the infection but finally succumbed to the disease on 15 April 1889.

In the 20th century pharmaceutical treatments for leprosy (Hansen’s disease) were developed. This meant that patients were no longer contagious after treatment, and isolation was no longer necessary. The forced quarantine laws in Hawaii were then abolished in 1969, more than 100 years after they were put in place. Some patients chose to leave Kalaupapa and reunite with their families, but many remained in the place that had become their home. Today, about 10 patients remain at Kalaupapa.

The disease of leprosy is caused by bacterial infection and mainly affects the skin, eyes, nose and peripheral nerves. Symptoms include light-coloured or red skin patches with reduced sensation, numbness and weakness in hands and feet. The term ‘leper’ in Scripture includes a wide variety of chronic skin diseases including what we know today as leprosy.

Mandatory self-isolation was the requirement for lepers under the Old Testament law (Lev 13-14:32). “*He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp*” (Lev 13:46). So when a leper came to Jesus, begging to be made clean he was desperate not only to be healed from his debilitating physical sickness but also to be rescued from his social isolation. The response of Jesus was extraordinary. Christ was ‘moved with pity’. The Greek word here indicates a very strong emotion felt bodily in the ‘gut’ or ‘inward parts’. The deep compassion of Jesus was expressed in courageous action as He stretched out his hand and touched the man. There were two reasons why people did not touch lepers. Firstly, out of fear of contracting the disease (as Father Damien did many centuries later in Hawaii). Secondly, for a Jew to touch a leper was to become ceremonially unclean yourself (Lev 5:3).

When Jesus touched the man, Christ healed his physical disease and also made him clean without becoming unclean Himself in the process. This restoration of the leper to health demonstrated not only Christ’s authority over physical sickness, but also His fulfilment of the Old Testament ceremonial law (Matt 5:17). The book of Leviticus contains the regulations for verifying that a leper had been made clean and Jesus instructed the healed man to follow these (1:44). Yet, apart from the healing from leprosy of Miriam (Num 12) and Naaman (2 Ki 5:1-15), the Old Testament does not reveal that lepers were healed, only that the law made provision for this if it ever occurred. So Christ fulfilled not only the ceremonial law but also the provisions for healing that foreshadowed His coming.

The healing of the leper also reveals the ability of Christ to bring a person who is isolated outside the covenant community into renewed fellowship. Even though the man was now free to be super-social and spread the good news about what Jesus had done for Him, Christ strongly warned him to keep quiet about his healing. Why the stern charge to keep silent about his radical transformation? Because Jesus did not come primarily to be a miracle-healer. His main mission was to preach the gospel (1:14). His authority to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand was evidenced by His extraordinary healing of the leper.

Yet despite the stern words of Jesus to the man, ‘*he went out and began to talk freely about it*’ (Mark 1:45). I certainly don’t want to say that the healed leper did the right thing, but I can understand how difficult it must have been for him to keep quiet! Meeting Jesus had had such a huge impact on his life. Have you met Jesus? Have you experienced His compassion as He reaches out to you in your need? Jesus had a public ministry for lepers (also Matt 10:8; Luke 7:22), the isolated sick. He also had a public ministry for those who could not move towards him without help, which brings us to our second point:

1. **A public ministry for the immobile**

Being able to move your body freely means that you can go where you want to go. When movement is restricted by physical disability or age, we become less independent. Some of our older members regularly use walkers to prevent falls whilst enabling them to retain some mobility. Many people who cannot walk due to injury or illness benefit from having a wheelchair.

To be immobile in Bible times meant that a person was completely dependent on others, was unable to do manual work to provide for themselves, and could not go where they pleased. Such was the condition of the ‘paralytic’ who was carried by four men to see Jesus at home in Capernaum. The Greek word translated ‘paralytic’ referred to a person who was lame, crippled, paralysed, disabled or weak of limb. Paralytics were not excluded from Jewish society like lepers but the commonly held view was that their suffering was a consequence of their own sinfulness (cf. John 9:2).

This paralytic was unable to walk. We don’t know any more about his condition than that. Clearly this paralytic in Capernaum had at least four good ‘friends in need’ who carried him to see Jesus in the firm belief that Jesus could heal him. They were friends with good problem-solving skills who were determined to see that their companion met Jesus. Finding the doorway to the house blocked by the gathered crowds who were listening to Jesus preach they removed at least part of the roof of the house in order to create another way in. It would have been quite a sight from inside the house as the light poured in through the newly formed hole in the roof and the bed carrying the paralytic was lowered down. Typically residential roofs in Palestine back then were flat and constructed with branches and dried clay. Today preaching in our worship services may stop due to some disturbance in the congregation. Someone might faint or a cell phone ring may be disruptive. The appearance of the disabled man in the midst of the crowd where Jesus was stopped Christ’s preaching the word.

Mark records that when Jesus saw the faith of the friends who had lowered the disabled man, he said to the paralytic ‘*Son, your sins are forgiven*’ (2:5). These are unexpected and extraordinary words. The man had come for physical healing, not forgiveness. Jesus spoke of the much more profound illness of sin as we’ll see shortly. In order to demonstrate His authority over both the physical and spiritual realms, Jesus simply told the man to get up, carry his bed and walk (v9). A simple command from Christ and the man was physically healed, exiting the house (presumably through the door) so that ‘*they were all amazed and glorified God saying “we never saw anything like this*’ (v12). In this miraculous healing, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament promise that the lame would share in the joy of the coming salvation (Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8). “*then shall the lame man leap like a deer*” (Isa 35:6)

The radical physical healings that Jesus performed during His earthly ministry were all signs that the Kingdom of God had drawn near, and that Christ was more than just a man. Sadly, some churches today teach, and some Christians believe, that it is God’s will for all those who have ‘sufficient’ faith to be completely well. This is often connected to the view that God wants all His faithful people to be materially wealthy. This false teaching is often called the ‘health and wealth gospel’. Just as many Jews in Bible times believed that personal sickness and disability were always a direct consequence of an individual’s sin, so promoters of the ‘health and wealth gospel’ believe that if you are sick or disabled, then your own sin or lack of strong enough faith is the reason. Jesus dispelled the falsehood that sickness is always a result of personal sin when He said of the man who had been born blind “*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him*” (John 9:3).

Jesus did not heal all those who were sick with various diseases and all those who were physically disabled in all of Palestine because this was not His main mission on earth back then. His central focus was preaching the gospel so that people who heard and believed Him could firstly be healed from their spiritual sickness and then, when He returns, receive a completely new body, fully mobile, disease free and fit for eternal life in paradise. More significant than the public ministry of Jesus to the isolated sick and the immobile was His ministry for the sinful because ultimately this is why He came to this earth. He said, ‘*the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost*’ (Luke 19:10) – which brings us to our third point:

1. **A public ministry for the sinful**

Christian churches can connect with their local communities in a variety of ways: providing a social setting for coffee and a chat, running a free or subsidised day-care centre, operating a foodbank or providing financial budgeting services. These can be helpful activities, but they are not the main focus and primary reason for the church’s existence.

First and foremost we are called to join Jesus in His mission to ‘*seek and save the lost*’. We do this by obeying His command to make disciples as we go about our lives. We are to be ‘fishers of men’, warning people of the coming judgement of God and proclaiming the gospel, calling people to ‘*repent and believe the gospel*’, as Jesus did when He ministered on this earth (Mark 1:15).

The good news of the gospel is revealed in the public ministry of Jesus for the sinful. When Jesus spoke to the paralytic declaring ‘*Son, your sins are forgiven*’ His words greatly troubled some of the scribes who were present. This didn’t sound like good news to them! They well knew from the Old Testament that only God can forgive sin. This is because ultimately and primarily all sin is rebellion against our Creator. We see this clearly when David confessed his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband, he wrote in Psalm 51 “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*” (v4).

The scribes would have known the words that opened our worship service this morning from Psalm 103: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity and who heals all your diseases*”. They had heard Jesus declare that the paralysed man’s sins were forgiven. He, like his friends, must have had faith in Christ. Then these scribes had seen the miraculous physical healing of the man, proving that Jesus had the authority of God. There’s no indicating that these ‘teachers of the law’ came to faith themselves when they saw a man doing what only God can do. In fact quite the opposite, they increasingly opposed Jesus.

As Mark’s gospel unfolds, we see further conflict as the scribes, most of whom were also Pharisees (Mark 2:16), spoke critically to His disciples about Jesus eating with ‘*tax collectors and sinners*’ (2:16). The Pharisees complained that the disciples of Jesus did not fast like them (2:18). The Pharisees accused His disciples of breaking the Sabbath laws by plucking heads of grain (2:24). When He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees plotted to kill him (3:6).

As his gospel unfolds, Mark traces the increasing opposition to Jesus from the Jewish religious leaders leading ultimately to His death on the cross. The root cause of this conflict was that Jesus claimed to be divine. There was plenty of evidence to back up His claim: He spoke with an authority not possessed by those who were studied in the Scriptures (1:22); The unclean spirits knew Him to be the Holy God (1:24) and they obeyed Him (1:27); He healed the sick and those with various diseases (1:34); He fulfilled the prophesy of the promised restoration of God who would make the lame walk again.

We could say that the claim of Jesus to be the divine Son of God was ‘evidence-based’. He did and said exactly what would be expected of God. He fulfilled the words of the Old Testament prophets about the coming Messiah. His character was ‘full of grace and truth’ reflecting the divine character (Col 1:15). The paralytic believed in Jesus, even though He did not know what we now know about the completed work of the Saviour on the cross. You don’t need to know everything that there is to know about Jesus before you can come to Him. As our text illustrates, He receives the most unlikely people who approach Him in the most unusual ways.

Notice how Jesus doesn’t get critical about the damage to the room of the house which was His home in Capernaum. Why? Because what was important was that someone had come to Him in faith and was healed, both physically and spiritually. This is a reason to rejoice because a person who had been lost was found (Luke 15:10). The people in the home of Jesus that day who saw Christ, the complete health worker in action, forgiving sins and healing were ‘*all amazed and glorified God, saying “we never saw anything like this*”’ (v12).

Most of us listening to this message today have read Mark’s gospel. We know that Jesus cleansed a leper, made a paralyzed man miraculously walk and forgave His sins. This is amazing and reveals Jesus to be who He is ‘The Son of God’. This is amazing and reveals Jesus to be the Saviour God who forgives sins. This is amazing and reveals Jesus to be who we all need most. Let us not cease to be amazed because we have heard this good news before!

There is a healthcare crisis in New Zealand at present. There is a healthcare crisis everywhere in this world at present. This healthcare crisis has existed since the fall of Adam and Eve. Only Jesus can fix this universal sickness. Only Jesus can completely restore your health: body and soul. So come to Him, believe in Him and go out like the healed leper and talk freely about the gospel and so spread the good news.

Unlike His command to the leper, Jesus has not sternly charged you to be quiet about Him, quite the opposite! We are called to proclaim the gospel as we tell others about Jesus. Brothers and sisters, friends, Jesus is the only complete health worker, fully restoring body and soul. Praise God for providing the healing that we all need through Jesus His Son.

AMEN.