

## Worship Resources - *Unclean*

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, Year B,

14<sup>th</sup> February, 2021

**2 Kings 5:1-14 CEV / Mark 1:40-45 CEV**

### Prelude

### ***Swing Low, Sweet Chariot***

arr. By Lee Evans,

played by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/PccLmdVqPrI>

### Intro / Call to Worship

Gathering in this sacred place we anticipate new wonders each week.

**Wherever two or three are gathered to worship, a holy spirit is present.**

Open our eyes to witness the fantastic love and wondrous joy waiting to be revealed, even this day, even in this place.

**We will want to linger in this space but when we leave today may our hearts be open to all the wonders of God's beautiful world.**

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

When we gather in person, we usually open our time together sharing words of peace and welcome with each other. As we listen to this piece played by our church musician Annie, let's give some thought as to who we would benefit from words of peace and welcome to this morning.

### Reflection video ***Cello Suite No 3 Minute I***

JS Bach,

played by Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/W0hCK5qRIFc>

### Invocation

O Holy One, on mountaintops and valley floors you reveal to us the light of your love. Our hearts desire is to bask in the amazing glory of the divine presence. With each encounter we are changed and transformed. Draw us nearer that we might receive a double portion of your Holy Spirit. Help us, O Holy One, to live our lives as a

reflection of divine glory. May we walk among our siblings and friends as a blessing, bearing light into dark places, hope to displace despair, and love that casts out hate. Our world is hurting and we need the followers of Jesus to follow more closely. Maybe then we will hear your voice speaking to us and saying, ... "listen to my Child, the Beloved!" Amen.

**We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.**

**In our reading from 2 Kings this morning, we hear the story of Naaman, a great general suffering from leprosy who seeks healing from his illness from Elisha. As we listen to these words, let's think about how we handle things when the solution we are presented doesn't fit our expectations.**

### **First Testament reading      2 Kings 5:1-14**

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. The Lord had helped him and his troops defeat their enemies, so the king of Syria respected Naaman very much. Naaman was a brave soldier, but he had leprosy.<sup>[a]</sup>

One day while the Syrian troops were raiding Israel, they captured a girl, and she became a servant of Naaman's wife.

Some time later the girl said, "If your husband Naaman would go to the prophet in Samaria, he would be cured of his leprosy."

When Naaman told the king what the girl had said,

the king replied, "Go ahead! I will give you a letter to take to the king of Israel." Naaman left and took along seven hundred fifty pounds of silver, one hundred fifty pounds of gold, and ten new outfits.

He also carried the letter to the king of Israel. It said, "I am sending my servant Naaman to you. Would you cure him of his leprosy?"

When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in fear and shouted, "That Syrian king believes I can cure this man of leprosy! Does he think I'm God with power over life and death? He must be trying to pick a fight with me."

As soon as Elisha the prophet[b] heard what had happened, he sent the Israelite king this message: “Why are you so afraid? Send the man to me, so that he will know there is a prophet in Israel.”

Naaman left with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house.

Elisha sent someone outside to say to him, “Go wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then you’ll be completely cured.”

But Naaman stormed off, grumbling, “Why couldn’t he come out and talk to me? I thought for sure he would stand in front of me and pray to the Lord his God, then wave his hand over my skin and cure me.

What about the Abana River[c] or the Pharpar River? Those rivers in Damascus are just as good as any river in Israel. I could have washed in them and been cured.”

His servants went over to him and said, “Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, you would have done it. So why don’t you do what he said? Go wash and be cured.”

Naaman walked down to the Jordan; he waded out into the water and stooped down in it seven times, just as Elisha had told him. Right away, he was cured, and his skin became as smooth as a child’s.

## A Time of Prayer

**Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: [vicarglenn@gmail.com](mailto:vicarglenn@gmail.com), and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.**

## Joys and Concerns

Today we give thanks for Myrna’s successful surgery this past week and her swift recovery with minimal pain.

We remember those who have been exposed to Covid19 through their job serving the public at places like UW and pray that they remain healthy and uninfected.

We also remember those who lack secure housing as the temperatures dip and the weather worsens.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

## Pastoral Prayer

We pray for the Christian community. May the words of Jesus and His healing touch, help us to live unselfishly and focus on serving others in the wider community:

We pray for all social outcasts. May the words of Jesus and His healing touch, inspire us to regard everyone as a possible neighbour.

We pray for those suffering in mind and spirit. May the words of Jesus and His healing touch, help us to care for them with dedication and good humour.

For those excluded from society: the poor, the refugees, the handicapped.

May the words of Jesus and His healing touch, help us to love them and come to their aid, just as Jesus.

Let us pray, in the silence of our hearts, for our own personal intentions:

*(pause in silent prayer....)*

God who saves, Your Son can restore the outcast, have mercy on us.

Stretch out Your hand over us and touch us and we will be saved. **Amen.**

**In our gospel lesson this morning we hear of Jesus healing a leper, one who is considered “unclean.” As we listen to these words from Mark, let’s think about who is considered “unclean” in our own world.**

## Gospel Lesson      Mark 1:40-45 CEV

A man with leprosy[a] came to Jesus and knelt down.[b] He begged, “You have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to.”

Jesus felt sorry for[c] the man. So he put his hand on him and said, “I want to! Now you are well.”

At once the man’s leprosy disappeared, and he was well.

After Jesus strictly warned the man, he sent him on his way.

He said, “Don’t tell anyone about this. Just go and show the priest that you are well. Then take a gift to the temple as Moses commanded, and everyone will know that you have been healed.”[d]

The man talked about it so much and told so many people, that Jesus could no longer go openly into a town. He had to stay away from the towns, but people still came to him from everywhere

## Message – Unclean

What comes to mind when you hear the word “unclean?” One might think of something that is dirty, that needs to be washed. It might bring to mind personal hygiene, of being in need of a shower, or it might remind us that we need to do some laundry. Regardless of what context, from this perspective, getting “clean” is a relatively simple problem with a simple solution. All we need to do is properly wash what is dirty, and it is restored.

Our scripture readings this week present a different situation, one that isn't quite as simple. What do you do when another person by definition is judged to be “unclean.” When that label has nothing to do with how they care for their hygiene, or laundry, or living situation. How can you become clean when you are deemed as untouchable due to situations entirely beyond your control?

In both our readings today, we are told that both characters are suffering from leprosy. Our initial reaction may be to equate that condition with our modern concept of the infectious Hansen's Disease, that results in skin lesions and over time often leads to loss of limbs, etc. And certainly in ancient times that definition was part of what was classified as leprosy. But in that biblical context, any significant skin condition could lead to you being branded a leper. And in being labeled as such, you immediately lost all validity as a participating member of society. You could no longer live with your family in relationship with the rest of your community. You were thrust out into the wilder places outside of the villages and towns. You had to announce your diagnosis to any who came near, so that they could take a wide berth and avoid becoming contaminated and “unclean” themselves. To come into contact with you could result in them being outcast as well.

This is what confronted Jesus in our story today. He is approached by one such person. Someone who is outcast and “unclean.” Someone who should be avoiding contact with him, and whom he certainly should be avoiding himself. Yet when he cries out to Jesus for healing, probably from a safe distance to be in compliance with the rules of the day, Jesus shows a visceral reaction. In our translation, we're told that Jesus “felt sorry” for the man. Yet other translations relay this as Jesus being “angry with” him. Superficially, we may wonder why Jesus would be angry with someone

who was in such a bad state. The Greek word used, *embrimaomai*, literally means to twist one's intestines. Regardless of the translation, it's clear the writer meant to relay a very strong reaction. And who could blame him. Here was someone who was suffering, likely for some period of time, for a situation that they had no control over. They were blemished and different from what was considered to be "normal" and "acceptable," and were ostracized because of it. He really shouldn't be even close enough to have a conversation with this man, and doing so put himself at risk. Yet he chooses not to heal him passively from a distance, but reaches out and "puts his hand on him" and heals him. With one act of compassion, he crosses the boundary of religious purity laws and enters into his space with him. He expresses his desire to help him, to make a difference in his life, to show compassion.

By healing him, he opens the way for him to be redeemed according to the social norms and religious law. He gives the man a choice, something he's not had to this point. He can show himself to the religious authorities and be redeemed. He can find his place among the "normal" and be reintegrated back into society. He can keep quiet about what has transpired and rejoin society and become part of the system again. He can seek the easy way out like Naaman in our first reading today. He can follow the rules and expectations of the day, make his donation, and be about his business. Or he can try to do something about it. He, like Jesus, can express anger at the injustice that system bestows on those who are different, who don't fit into the mold of what's "normal." He can use his voice to proclaim that it doesn't have to be this way, that God offers us another way. He can offer his own testimony about how that different way has transformed his life. A way that offers love and compassion instead of callous exclusion. A way that is outside of what is considered "normal" and "right;" choosing to ally with the outcast over the "in" crowd. A choice Jesus has just solidified for himself.

The writer tells us that the man's subsequent evangelism now keeps Jesus out of the towns and cities. But it's probably more a matter of his actions in this story that now drive Jesus to the countryside. He's now physically touched a leper. Word will have gotten around that he is now unclean as well,. It's not that his identity as the messiah is known so much as he's now just as unclean as a leper in the eyes of the powers that be. He chose to be outcast and unclean; to live a life outside and often in opposition to the system, to the "normal" way of things.

We have the same choice presented to us. While most of us probably haven't encountered many suffering from leprosy, or Hansen's disease in our own lives, I can guarantee we all have experiences with the "lepers" of today. Those who get a wide berth in the public spaces, those who look different or whose lives are lived

differently from what is considered “normal” or the way it's “supposed to be done,” Those who get the sidelong looks, who generate the hushed whispers in the public square, or in the fellowship hall. We can choose to be “in” with the “right” crowd, and exclude those who don't “fit the norm” or we can join those on the outside, and make our home among the outcasts and excluded.

Today's texts generate many questions for me, but not necessarily answers. Are we willing to make that choice? Can we risk losing the safety and security of fitting in with the mainstream? Is our priority the way we look or the performance we give instead of who we care for and the ideals we fight for? Do we focus on income streams and attendance over the risk of stepping out in faith to places where “common sense” tells us we shouldn't be? Our faith ancestors were those on the outside, those who didn't fit in. Can we be as bold? More than anything, the texts this week speak to the strength of faith. Whether Naaman questioning the simplicity of a bath in the Jordan, or the leper choosing a path outside the norm, we have choices to make.

Will we follow Christ's example and choose the path that doesn't exclude, or will we cling to the rules and laws that stigmatize and scapegoat? I hope and pray that we all take time this week to ponder these questions, from our individual perspectives and from our perspective together. Are we clean and secure, or unclean and outcast? If we aren't where we should be, what can we do to get on the right path. May we choose wisely. Amen.

## **Call to Serve.**

Peter offered to build a tabernacle on the mountain with Jesus. But God does not dwell in houses made with human hands. Let us offer ourselves in service to those God loves. Let us offer our sacrifices to build community, bring peace, and be a double blessing to those in need throughout the world. Amen

**As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought to how we can reach out to those on the outside of society, in the outer places of our world, and what we value in our faith walks.**

## A Time for Reflection

### Reflection on the Word [Video] *The Wayfaring Stranger,*

spiritual, arr. By Lee Evans,  
played by Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/Vg6l8M0yphI>

### The Prayer of Thanksgiving

With these gifts we proclaim not ourselves but Jesus and commit ourselves to follow a way that leads to love and life. May our sacrifice be witness to our love for each other and the God who loves us all. Amen

### Blessing/Assurance

God is flat-out in the healing business. It often doesn't look like what we expect it to be, but it's there: when we are able to forgive one another, when we bring peace and wholeness to a hurting world, when we bring newness to the dead and parched areas of our lives. See, God makes all things new! Go forth, in the strength of God's love and God's promise of love and peace. **Amen.**

**As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.**

### Postlude *Be Still, My Soul*

music by Jean Sibelius, arr. By Lee Evans,  
performed by church musician Annie Center,  
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<https://youtu.be/IPx9UUJYd1w>