

14 February 2021

Writings: Excitement

But (the Leper) went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly (Mark 1:45).

There is a story about a father who was about to celebrate his fortieth birthday. He had always wanted to buy a big screen television for the basement but with his growing family he never had the funds to do so. His wife decided to talk to the relatives about buying him one for his birthday and together they gathered enough money to purchase the TV. On the big day, they set the television up in the basement then went upstairs and hid so they could surprise him when he came home from work. "Now remember", the wife told their youngest son, "we have to be quiet when dad opens the door and wait until he comes into the living room before we all jump up and shout 'Happy Birthday'. Then we will take him downstairs and show him his present". The moment the father opened the door, the youngest son jumped up from behind the couch where he was hiding and shouted "Dad, you should see the big television we bought you for your birthday. It's in the basement. Come, let me show you". The father and all the relatives burst out laughing. What the youngest son proved was, when you have exciting news, you have to share it.

In today's Gospel, after Jesus told a leper not to tell others about his miraculous healing, the man did so anyway. Although the man's excitement about what had happened to him was understandable, it also inhibited Christ's ability to undertake his mission.

During Christ's lifetime, leprosy was a terrible disease. It disfigured an individual's flesh so badly; others would not look at the person. Since it was considered contagious, lepers were forced to live at the edge of the community so as to limit the spread of the disease and beg for food from those who passed by them. Leprosy also made Jews ritually impure and was seen by many as a divine punishment for one's sins. It isolated a person from their family and friends, made them destitute and imposed a sense of guilt and shame upon him or her.

When Jesus healed the leprosy, the man was essentially given his life back. The Jewish Law required the leper to show himself to a priest to verify he was free of the disease and could rejoin the community. Since the healing of a leper was a rare event, the miracle Jesus performed would also be recognized. It seems clear from the story Christ's motivation was compassion and pity. He wanted to show this one man how God had not abandoned him. In the excitement of the moment, the leper was not placing the miracle in any larger context. He was healed and wanted his family, friends and the larger community to know it. Yet, the mission of Jesus was to preach the arrival of God's Kingdom and the need for repentance. The novelty of the miracle had the potential to distract people from this larger message. The man likely thought he was doing Jesus a favor in spreading the news. Yet, the result was Christ's ability to do his mission was inhibited.

As disciples of Jesus, our efforts to spread the Gospel are usually motivated by the right intentions. Our goal is to draw people into a relationship with Christ by sharing our faith. We have good news and can't wait to tell everyone about it. Yet, sometimes our excitement drives people away rather than draw them closer. In our desire to help Jesus, we get in the way. It might help if we first ask Jesus what he wants them to do and then listen to the response. It might not be what we want or expect to hear. But, the mission is Christ's not ours. We are his instruments. When we remember this, he is not inhibited by our well intentioned but misguided helpfulness.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, there are many opportunities to make Christ present to those who are in distress. However, before undertaking what we think is a sure-fire way to help someone, it might be wise to wait to be asked or to make an offer and await the response. Covid 19 makes many people feel helpless. We want to do something, anything, just to show the pandemic doesn't control us. We need to ask ourselves are we doing this action for others or for us. As followers of Jesus, we also must ask are we doing this for him. By listening to Christ and others, we can be sure our efforts not only show our good intentions to help people deal with Covid 19 but actually do so.

Message for Website
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Like the youngest son and the leper, it is easy to become caught up in the excitement of the moment. But a wise disciple, channels that excitement into actions which have a long-term positive impact on people.