

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Psalm 111

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Mark 1:21-28

Sermon January 31st, 2020

Jesus Makes Us Holy

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' first act of his ministry is to make someone clean. To break down the barrier that exists between this person and God's holiness. To help this person see where God's love is at work in their lives. Setting the tone for the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

If we recall the purpose of the priestly laws that we read about in Leviticus, and that Jesus is living through in the context of our gospel, these laws were to keep the places where God's holiness dwelled from intersecting with our moral and ritual uncleanness. Unfortunately, this meant that when we were unclean, we had to wait to be cleansed before re-entering this place where God's holiness dwelled (**Image**). Thus, our uncleanness became a barrier between us and God's holiness. Our uncleanness made it hard for us to see where God's love was at work in our lives.

Now the priestly system had ways that people could become clean. Some ways were easier than others depending on what made them unclean.

What we see in our gospels is that like the Priests, Jesus has come to remove the barriers that prevent us from experiencing God's holiness. Whether it is cleansing people from unhealthy spirits or healing people from a physical or mental ailment (**Image**). Whether it is challenging the social barriers that marginalize people within the faith community, or reinterpreting the religious barriers that exclude people from participating in worship.

As it says in the book of Hebrews, Jesus takes on this role of high priest for us. Except with Jesus we are accepted into these places, where God's holiness dwells, more immediately. And also, we are accepted not on what we do to become clean, but on what Jesus does for us to make us clean.

So, Jesus comes into our lives to break down the barriers that stop us from experiencing God's holiness. Jesus comes into our lives to make us clean. To make us holy. To reveal where God's love is at work in our lives.

Like this person that we hear about in our gospel this morning, we too, face barriers in our lives that can stop us from experiencing God's holiness. Even after Jesus has come into our world to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We can still run into

barriers that make it hard for us to experience God's holiness. We can still run into barriers that make it hard for us to see God's love working in our lives.

For example, when our physical or mental health is impacted through illness, grief, stress we can struggle to feel God's presence (**Image**). We may even separate ourselves from God, because we are so angry at God for letting us suffer day after day. Or we may feel despair, because we can't imagine things being different. We feel stuck. We end up turning away from God, because what is the point in believing in God if nothing will change.

Sometimes we feel guilt and shame, because we keep doing things that hurt the people we love. Even though we don't want to. When we deal with any kind of addiction, we can find ourselves in this rut (**Image**). We end up feeling like we don't deserve God's love. So, we pull away from everyone we love including God.

Sometimes we feel ignored or isolated or alone, because of an experience of rejection from a community. When this happens within a religious community we may disconnect from God and God's community, because we feel so hurt from this rejection (**Image**). We feel shame. Undeserving of being in God's presence. Or we are angry and frustrated that people would judge us for things we don't believe we should be judged for. So, we leave the community.

Sometimes we find ourselves overwhelmed by commitments that we put God in a box and leave the box in the basement of our brain.

Sometimes we feel disconnected to the mission of the church, because it doesn't fit into what we think the church should be. Whether it is struggling with connecting to the more traditional worship at our parent's church, or not liking all the contemporary songs that have been added over the years. Whether it is the church we go to, teaching certain things that we don't agree with, or we feel the focus in the church is on issues we think are not as important as other issues that we should be focusing our attention on.

There are a lot of barriers that make it hard for us to experience God's holiness. There are a lot of barriers that make it hard for us to see where God's love is at work in our lives.

Like the person in our gospel this morning, Jesus comes into our lives daily to break down these barriers. To welcome us into the presence of God's holiness. To reveal to us where God's love is at work in our lives. To make us holy so that we can welcome people into the presence of God's holiness. So, we can reveal to people where God's love is at work in their lives.

Jesus does this in so many ways. From forgiving us when we fall short to welcoming us when no one else will. From pointing us to scripture when we get lost in the ways of the world to sending people into our lives to help us reconnect with our faith when all those other commitments get in the way. From healing us when we are hurting physically or mentally, to comforting us when our pain seems to stick around for a while.

Jesus forgives us, heals us, comforts us, teaches us, through scripture (**Image**), through the sacraments (**Image**), through song, through prayer (**Image**), through our brothers and sisters in Christ, through our loved ones, through the stranger (**Image**). Jesus continues to break down the barriers that get in the way of our experience of God's holiness.

When Johnny Cash did a cover of a song by Nine Inch Nails called Hurt, I instantly connected with that song. I believed God introduced me to this song in a time in my life where I was doing a lot of self reflection on the messiness of my past. This song helped me heal from some of my past wounds, because this song connected me to the pain I experienced, but also, to the hope I was walking towards. It broke down a major barrier for me, paving the way for me to accept the call to be a pastor in our church.

Jesus comes to us and breaks down those barriers that stop us from experiencing God's holiness. Making us holy so that we can stand in God's holy presence, but also, invite others to stand along with us.

So, we too, can break down the barriers as Jesus does for us. Becoming a hospitable community who welcomes people where they are at (**Image**). Becoming a forgiving community who works hard to heal relationships wherever possible. And where not possible, heal the hearts of those who are broken. Becoming a community who walks with people who are suffering from mental or physical health ailments (**Image**). Becoming a community that reflects God's healing and renewal in our words and our deeds.

Today, Jesus reveals his purpose. Today, we are reassured that Jesus is breaking down the barriers in our lives daily. Helping us experience God's holiness. Helping us see God's healing love. Today, we stand with Jesus breaking down the barriers that keep others from experiencing God's holiness. God's healing love.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you send your Son into our lives to break down those barriers that get in between us and you. When our shame, our loneliness, our anger, our rejection makes it hard for us to stand in your presence. Heal us. Cleanse us. Make us Holy so we can stand in your presence, but also, so we can invite others to stand in your presence with us. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen**.

