

Treasure

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Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 30] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[6 : 46] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Thank you.

[8 : 12] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Show us our strength. Remind us of your ever-creating and comforting hand and presence.

Amen. Know this. God's love and grace surround you no matter what. You are a precious, forgiven, and holy creation of God.

Christ's very life and forgiveness are given for you, for me, for all. We celebrate God's gift of grace, God's gift of love.

And so there's a wonderful old hymn called Love Divine, All Loves Excelling. And I invite you to stand if you're able, if you'd like to. If you want to stay seated, that's okay too.

But as we celebrate God's love this day. Love Divine, All Loves Excelling Joy of heaven to earth come down Fix in us thy humble dwelling All thy faithful mercies crown Jesus, thou art all compassion Pure, unbounded, love the world Visit us with thy salvation Enter every trembling heart Breathe, O breathe, thy loving spirit

[10 : 19] Into every troubled breast Let us all leave thee in merit Let us find that second rest Take away our bent to sinning Alpha and Omega be End of faith as its beginning Set our hearts at liberty Finish then thy new creation Pure and spotless Let us be Let us see thy great salvation Perfectly restored in thee Changed from glory into glory Till in heaven we take our place

Till we cast our crowns before thee Lost in wonder Lost in wonder Love and praise Amen. Please be seated.

The idea this morning Is that we are A treasure Just like this beautiful glass Is a treasure Found Richard Paul Evans wrote Some people spend so much time Hunting treasure That they fail to see That it's all around them And it is as if They are sifting through gold Looking for the silt The sand The dirt Instead of recognizing That the treasure Is in each And every one

Of us It's time for us To give some consideration To what we bring And our offering Like everything else Is different These days And there are different ways To give to the church There's a list of them Up on the screen And so I invite you To partake of any of those We also are Receiving some special offerings This morning For the least The lost And the little ones Those we are in ministry to Specifically In Niagara Falls And in our own community And there are so many things That come under that umbrella Of the least The lost And the little ones And so that is our Special offering for today For this minute I invite you I invite you To consider That you are the treasure

And that we are gathered In this place For you to bring Yourself And that we are And that we are Let the Jang There are one The ■ Cri ■ Of the people Of the appropri People And that we are Let theskuk To■ Do And that we are See Do Si talent And Parents in Amen.

[14 : 41] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, you are good and your mercy endures forever. You have showered blessings upon each and everyone of us and we come to you with thanksgiving, with gratitude, with commitment and praise.

We pray that you will receive these gifts from our heart, that they will bring you joy and be a blessing to you. We pray that you bless them, Lord, to be a blessing to others that they too may experience your love, your power, your grace in ministry through us by your power and your word.

[17 : 47] In Jesus' name, amen. Please be seated. We come here in worship to not only praise God, but also to connect with God in a way where we know that God hears the cries of our heart, that God walks with us and hears us and lifts us up in every moment.

And so I know that many of us are carrying burdens on our heart. And so let's come to the Lord in prayer. Holy God, we come before you this day praising you, exalting you, knowing that you hear us when we cry.

And there are so many things, Lord, that are not the way they are supposed to be in this world, not the way they're supposed to be in our lives. And we pray that you will hear these cries and minister to them, Lord.

We lift up so many things in this time. Lord, we pray for you to reach out to the people in Texas, that you will cover them by your grace, that you will give them your protection, that you will give the hungry food and the thirsty water, that you will provide your warmth, that you will minister to them, Lord, and give them your peace, give them your strength.

Lord, in all of our moments, as we go through times of struggle, we pray, too, that you will give us your strength. Times when we feel uncertain, times when we are struggling, we pray that your mighty hand will reach out and lift us up and carry us when we cannot stand.

[19 : 27] Lord, we pray for people who are struggling in their bodies, Lord. There are people who are struggling in pain, and we pray in the name of Jesus Christ that pain be cast out, that your holy anointing be on people throughout their bodies, that anything within their body that is not functioning the way it should be, Lord, that you will have your healing hand upon them.

We pray for recovery in all of the different areas of people's bodies, that they will not only be pain-free, but disease-free. We cast out any and all diseases, Lord, and we pray that your hand will be upon people who are struggling in this area, that they will experience you powerfully, your healing in whatever way you deliver it, Lord.

We pray for healing in people's bodies, and we pray for people's minds, Lord. Healing of the mind, that as the darkness of this world, the darkness of the enemy seeks to penetrate our minds with discouragement and sorrow and depression and anxiety and all the things that are negative that seek to bring us down, Lord, that you will have instead a blanket of protection over and around us, a hedge of protection keeping us from that, and instead any of those places of darkness within us, in any area of our life, Lord, that you will fill those places with your light, your love, restore those places.

Lord, we pray that you will shower us instead with grace. By the power of your word, we are covered by the blood of Jesus, and we pray that anything that comes to add us will pass first through that.

Lord, we pray that you will set our hearts upon you, that our will will be aligned to you, our ways aligned to you, that the people in our paths will know that you are there and you are true and you are loving through us.

[21 : 17] We pray for our families, that you will fill our families with your grace, and we pray for all relationships, Lord, that if there be any brokenness, that there be forgiveness abounding, that you will draw people together in unity through you.

Holy God, we thank you for your ministering to us, ministering to others, for the grace that you pour out upon us and others, for the blessings you shower down, and we pray that you will always give us a repentant heart, a thankful heart, a heart that seeks you in all things, for you are good and you are holy.

And we praise you this day and every day. Amen. Amen. Today's scripture is from Matthew chapter 8, verses 1 through 4.

When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

[23 : 06] Then Jesus said to him, see that you don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded as a testimony to them.

This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. The good news is that leprosy is cured.

That while there have been cases here and there throughout the world, medically, it's been cured. Lepers, back then, if you had leprosy, the first thing is you were considered to be a person who had already died because you would never be allowed in community.

You would never be allowed into your own home again. You would never be allowed to be, if there was a walled city, you always had to stay on the outside of it.

Not only that, but if people came near you, you were supposed to say, I am unclean, I am unclean, I am unclean.

[24 : 28] I want us to think about the fact that that was then, and this is now.

Can you ever imagine yourself calling someone unclean? Has anybody ever called somebody unclean? If you have teenagers, I had an amateur competitive rollerblader.

And if any of you have kids who play ice hockey, same thing. Basically, could you just leave that all outside because it smells really bad.

Boy Scouts, coming home from Boy Scout camp, just take the suitcase or the bag, take whatever it is, and just leave it by the washing machine and then right to the shower.

Except for my youngest son, who when I opened the bag, all the clothes, because it was his first time, were layered, shorts, shirt, underwear, rolled up, socks, so that he would have something to wear every day.

[25 : 45] They were all still rolled up. Why, you might ask? Was that because when you came home with your Boy Scout shirt on that had every meal and every activity on it, that you wanted me to replicate this story?

Unclean, unclean, go away. And when I asked him why he hadn't worn any of the clean clothes, he said, if you wanted to get, after flag ceremony or whatever is done first thing in the morning, if you wanted to get a place in archery or a rifle or whatever it is, the fun things with some kind of like weapons.

and targets. Then you didn't have time to change your clothes. You had to go. Okay. So he went. So, we think that leprosy is cured.

And as I said, we know that medically, the disease is cured. But we have seen and experienced other kinds of leprosy.

AIDS was leprosy. Don't touch. Don't get close to. And people took a long time to learn that you could be close to a person with AIDS.

[27 : 16] What's our new leprosy? COVID is our new leprosy. I'm hoping through our conversation here this morning that we might see and be able to talk a little bit about how much God wants us to find healing, help, guidance in this scripture passage about not only how to be with other people but how to be with ourselves.

So first, I want to talk about this man with leprosy and how he approached Jesus. Now, first of all, he shouldn't be approaching Jesus.

But he did. He came with confidence. We don't even know how he knew that this was Jesus who had cured people. We don't know because he wouldn't have been allowed at public gatherings and with other people.

But somehow, he had in himself the knowledge, the confidence that this is where his healing was going to come from. So he stepped right up with that confidence.

He also had some humility in the way that he approached Jesus because he didn't come up to him and say, you, you, you, you, you, you've healed all these people.

[28 : 57] I want you to heal me. Heal me now. He says, if you would be willing to heal me. You see, as I said, a leper was considered a dead person already so they expected nothing.

They thought of themselves as nothing and they expected other people to think of them as nothing. I remember witnessing a teenager in a store with his mother and I was somewhere, some way away from them and I witnessed a couple of people who were looking at this teenager and going, what is that?

Who would let their teenager out of the house looking like that? So, of course, as a mother of teenagers I went, what? What about the teenager who had a little bit of a mohawk going on and it might have been colors on the top and had clean clothes on.

It just happened that red pants, red shirt might have even had red jute probably from the Salvation Army because the pants were polyester. No.

Could we just hold on a minute? Why? Would anybody look at a teenager like that and say those kinds of things?

[30 : 42] as if that teenager couldn't hear that someone in their near presence was basically acting as though they were nothing, not a person, just the funny way according to them that this young man was dressed.

so a leper would, he would be coming and he would say, he said, if you will, you can cleanse me. It was as if he was saying, I know I don't matter and I know other people will run away from me.

I know that. But if you would, would you cleanse me? And the third thing is that he came with reverence.

On his knees, Lord. He called Jesus Lord. Says, verse 2, a man with a skin disease came, knelt before him and said, Lord, if you want you can make me clean.

He knelt and he called him Lord. So he had reverence for who this Savior was.

[32 : 09] Even at a time when many had no idea who Jesus was or what he was about or what he was doing. So that was how the leper came.

So what about Jesus? His response, verse 3, Jesus reached out his hand and he touched him.

He touched him. Nobody touched lepers. No touching. Is that familiar to any of us these days?

No hugging if it's not your family. no passing of the peace in church. No hand holding while anybody's looking.

No touching. Six feet. I see that. But you're loud. You live in the same house. For Jesus.

[33 : 26] Jesus. There was only one obligation towards any human being. One obligation. Love and compassion.

Only one. First and only. Love and compassion. The law was love. And all the other obligations, the staying six feet away.

does that sound familiar? The law was to stay six feet away from lepers. What did I say? What did we say was the new leprosy? COVID. Jesus.

To him love crossed all the boundaries. Now of course we might have a sense that Jesus wouldn't catch leprosy.

Which was a very deadly disease. So it wasn't like the law was wrong or unhealthy. But for Jesus crossing that boundary was important.

[34 : 36] And Jesus calls us to cross boundaries. Not ones that might get us sick. But we'll talk about that in a minute. So what might that mean to us?

What difference does it mean to us this story? Sometimes the people that we look at like lepers are people that are simply different from us.

People that make us nervous. People we're uncertain around. We look sometimes at people like lepers when they have physical disabilities.

Mental health disabilities. people who are in their babies. I've told you before about a friend whose daughter who's in her late twenties. She walks like a drunken sailor, but she walks.

She doesn't talk, but she expresses herself. She vocalizes, she doesn't verbalize. And when her mother or her father or her big sister takes her to the grocery store and they now have chairs for adults like Laura at the grocery stores.

[36 : 16] And the looks that they get and the things people say, it's as though they might catch what Laura has, birth defects.

So those are the things that we can see. Then there are the things that we cannot see. Sometimes we might look at ourselves as lepers.

When we look at ourselves in the mirror, how many of you first and always see the best thing about yourself?

Did you laugh out loud? Not only do we look at other people sometimes, we look at ourselves and we think, so, Kathy, you're preaching today.

You're preaching about leprosy and sea glass and all of that. So, wear blue. It makes your eyes look bluer.

[37 : 35] Pick a piece of blue sea glass out because it's a color that's good for you. Now, I can tell you honestly that didn't have anything to do with it.

but why do we need to think about it? Why do we need to think about what other people think or how people feel about how we're dressed or how our hair is, how tall we are, how short we are, how we're built?

we are a culture that is obsessed with that perfect look. And we have a God who sent Jesus to heal the leper and to try to have us be healed from that sense of, what did I say?

I know I don't matter. I know other people don't want to be with me. And Jesus came to heal that. Not only to heal that from our own thoughts about ourselves because if you go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, it says we were created in whose image?

Let's say what? Let me hear you. Whose image? In God's image. image. And I'm standing here as guilty as the next person when we look and criticize ourselves.

[39 : 14] We are criticizing we who are made in the image of God and God wants us to be healed of that. Because if we can be healed of that, then we begin to look at other people not as better than or worse than or luckier or unluckier or have more or have less.

Where do we fit in the scheme of things? We look at other people made in the image of God. Every single person made in the image of God.

Every single person having access to the grace and love and salvation of Jesus Christ. Every single person.

And how do we respond to that discomfort? A lot of times what we find is that if we're not comfortable with ourselves, we sometimes look at others to make ourselves feel better or feel worse.

Jesus touching this leper, physically touching this leper, was an outrageous, outrageous act.

[40 : 53] He was showing anyone who might have been looking that there is no person, no person outside of the kingdom of God.

There is no one here, there is no one within the sound of my voice online, no one who is outside of the kingdom of God.

no one ever who is not worthy of being a part of this community. And therefore, this community is called upon to act in outrageous love towards any who would come and be with us, worthy of healthy touch, which might look more like a card or phone call or a hey or an elbow or a text message than an actual touch.

We are treasured by God. We are beautiful. This piece of sea glass looks more, it is shaped more like what it started out to be, just a broken bottle, broken jar, broken something.

It has not been smoothed out. It has not been rocked and rolled in the waves of the ocean or a river. river. We don't always feel like we get more beautiful just because we went through a lot of hard stuff.

[42 : 42] Some of you, some of us would be like the most beautiful people in the world if we were made more beautiful on the outside by what has happened to us in our lives.

But what God sees is that in the distortions and the sharpness just the beauty, just the treasure.

We can experience healing and sometimes it won't change the fact that one leg is shorter than the other or hips that don't work or we can't see without glasses or we are too tall, too skinny, whatever we might be.

You can see I use those because I've never been too tall or too skinny. it doesn't matter. What Jesus sees us as is the finest treasure and gem in the world.

No matter how broken we are, no matter how broken we think we are when we're not broken at all. so the healing can start in here and then spread because even though he told the leper don't tell anyone, anyone who had ever known him knew he was healed and he sent him back to the temple.

[44 : 29] And if you ever think you're interested in how it is that people are, why they have to go back, why he sends him back to the temple.

I encourage you to go to Leviticus chapter 14, it's 57 verses long. So, I'm not reading it. But the leper had to be examined by a priest.

And then it goes on and on, all the things that have to go back. So why did Jesus tell him to do that? He told him to do that because the faith community could claim him as healed and the rest of the world would accept him.

May we, may you, may I, be healed in this place so that we know when we go from this place that we belong, that we are who we're supposed to be.

We are who God made us to be and God's grace is available to us through Jesus Christ every day of our lives. And communion reminds us of that week after week.

[45 : 51] Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. It is indeed a gift to be able to come to the Lord's Table and participate in this great sharing together.

So let us ready our hearts as we come to worship with the Lord. The Lord be with you. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you. In the beginning, you breathe life into raw material, creating and animating containers of beauty and goodness.

We, your holy vessels, were fired in the kiln of love until we shined with your light. Susceptible to shattering, we find ourselves broken, unable at times to remember your promise of repair.

You remind us time and again that though broken, we are held in your presence and made whole by your grace. And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join in their unending hymn.

[47 : 35] Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus the Christ. Holy are you for being a divine presence on earth. Your spirit anointed him as a container of grace in the form of preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, and announcing that the time had come when you would save your people. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with those considered to broken for company.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to the path of healing and recovery, delivered us from despair and isolation, and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit.

When Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always. In the power of your word and Holy Spirit, we are not alone.

And on the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, he gave thanks to you, and then he broke the bread, and then he gave it to his disciples, saying, Take and eat, because this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

[49 : 23] And then when the supper was over, he took the cup, and he gave thanks to you, and gave it to his disciples, and he said, Take and drink from this, all of you. This is my blood, sign of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this as often as you drink in remembrance of me. And so, in remembrance of these, the healing and life-transforming acts of Jesus Christ, We offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup.

Make them be for us, your healing spirit, through Christ, that we may be for the world, the body of Christ, healing agents in a broken world, offering the lifeblood of hope.

By your spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

[50 : 52] Through your son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, healing God, now and forever. Amen.

I want to invite you to gently remove your mask and take your communion elements. Start with the side that has the cracker on it, and open it and remove it.

And know that this is the body of Christ, which is given for you. Take now and eat. And as we come to the other side, know that this is the blood of Christ, which was shed for you.

Take now and receive. Let us be thankful in our hearts for this great gift of our Lord, as we continue to remember and worship him together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[52 : 10] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I'd like to invite y'all to stand if you're able, as we sing together about our God who breaks chains.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yeah. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. If you've been walking the same old road for miles and miles If you've been hearing the same old voice, tell the same old lies If you're trying to fill the same old holes inside There's a better life, there's a better life If you've got pain, he's a pain taker If you feel lost, he's a way maker If you need freedom or saving, he's a prison shaking saviour

If you've got chains, he's a chain breaker We've all searched for the light of day and the dead of night We've all found ourselves worn out for the same old mind We've all run to things we know that just ain't right When there's a better life, there's a better life If you've got pain, he's a pain taker If you feel lost, he's a way maker If you need freedom or saving, he's a prison shaking saviour If you've got chains, he's a chain breaker

If you believe it If you receive it If you can't feel it, somebody testify Testify If you believe it If you receive it If you can't feel it Somebody testify Testify If you believe it If you receive it If you can't feel it Somebody testify If you've got pain, he's a pain taker If you feel lost, he's a way maker If you need freedom or saving, he's a prison shaking saviour

[55 : 46] If you've got chains, he's a chain breaker If you need freedom or saving, he's a prison shaking saviour If you've got chains, he's a chain breaker You've found these beautiful things Out of dust From dust, you came And so you, too, are beautiful Go out into the world And believe it about yourself And when you look at others And you think about rolling your eyes Remember, Jesus touched the most unclean of all.

So let us remember that and know that Jesus would never roll his eyes at you. So may we go and believe it and be changemakers out in this world that so desperately needs healing.

Go in the peace of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.