

World AIDS Day Service

Meditation (Past) for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, November 26, 2017

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

World AIDS Day is December 1. On Sunday, Nov. 26, 2017, at 10:30 AM, three congregations located in Decatur GA that share space in our physical plant will gather for a unified worship service. First Christian Church of Decatur will serve as host for our friends at Gentle Spirit Christian Church and Unity Fellowship. The three pastors will offer a meditation on AIDS: James Brewer-Calvert is doing Past; Pastor Paul Turner is doing Present; and Rev. Maressa Penderman is doing Future.

Scriptures: Leviticus 13: 45-46; Luke 5: 12-16

Leviticus 13:45-46 (The Message)

“Any person with a serious skin disease must wear torn clothes, leave his hair loose and unbrushed, cover his upper lip, and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’

As long as anyone has the sores, that one continues to be ritually unclean. That person must live alone; he or she must live outside the camp.

Luke 5:12-16 (NRSV)

Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” ¹³ Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do choose. Be made clean.” Immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴ And he ordered him to tell no one. “Go,” he said, “and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.”

¹⁵ But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. ¹⁶ But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.

Meditation (Past)

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sores, that one continues to be ritually unclean. That person must live alone; he or she must live outside the camp.” (Leviticus 13:45-46)

These words were written by well-intentioned people, and commonly accepted as the Law of Moses. They were followed by Levite Priests and the whole people of God for centuries.

In Jesus' time, he and his neighbors would have been familiar with the practice of discrimination and process of exclusion.

In Jesus' time, the Jewish Law was clear: if white spots develop on your skin, you are required to withdraw from civilization. If anybody comes near you, you were required to cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” to keep them away, a warning to keep their distance, a self-effacing, embarrassing description of unworthiness.

Lepers or those with unknown or misunderstood diseases had to live isolated, separate, outside the camp, outside the city, outside the human community.

And then God acted. Along came God, in human form, named Jesus of Nazareth, to show us another way, a holistic way, a compassionate way to experience restoration as well as to respond to those in our midst who are hurt and hurting, in need of health and healing.

Jesus overcame human prejudices and fears, choosing to touch the untouchable. Jesus did not discriminate in his healing, especially when the illness itself had a discriminating effect.

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Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do choose. Be made clean.” Immediately the leprosy left him.”

Immediately the Law of Moses gave way to the Grace of God & the God of Grace. God in Christ chose. Chose to heal. Chose to love.

We can choose, too.

In our recent past the actor Tom Hanks played a lawyer in the movie “Philadelphia. His character was stricken with AIDs, and when his law firm found out, he was fired. He hired an up and coming attorney played by Denzel Washington to represent him. Great story, script, cast, and director. “Philadelphia” gave the gift of dignity to families and individuals suffering from AIDS and HIV. When Tom Hanks won the Academy Award for Best Actor, he said:

“I would not be standing here if it weren't for two very important men in my life... Mr. Rawley Farnsworth, who was my high school drama teacher, who taught me to act well the part, there all the glory lies. And one of my classmates under Mr. Farnsworth, Mr. John Gilkerson. I mention their names because they are two of the finest gay Americans, two wonderful men that I had the good fortune to be associated with, to fall under their inspiration at such a young age. I wish my babies could have the same sort of teacher, the same sort of friends.”

“And there lies my dilemma here tonight. I know that my work in this case is magnified by the fact that the streets of heaven are too crowded with angels. We know their names. They number a thousand for each one of the red ribbons that we wear here tonight. They finally rest in the warm embrace of the gracious creator of us all. A healing embrace that cools their fevers, that clears their skin, and allows their eyes to see the simple, self-evident, common sense truth that is made manifest by the benevolent creator of us all and was written down on paper by wise men, tolerant men, in the city of Philadelphia two hundred years ago. God bless you all. God have mercy on us all. And God bless America.”

God has mercy on us all. God's mercy is present in our grief. We grieve for those shunned or made to feel they were not worthy, that they were somehow unclean, who were made to live outside the camp, outside the reaches of human community. We grieve for the incredible, senseless loss of so many wonderful souls who have died far too young due to AIDS and HIV, including the young man who rescued me from drowning at age 14, and a childhood friend of my wife Betty, and our family members and neighbors the world over. May we commit before God and one another that never, ever will we tolerate discrimination, and that together we shall strive toward seeing *"the simple, self-evident, common sense truth that is made manifest by the benevolent creator of us all."*

The truth is that God's mercy is with us in our healing and in our choosing to touch and hold the hurt and hurting. God in Christ chose to heal. Chose to love. We can choose to be and share the Good News as well.

The Lord's Table is opening before us, graciously welcoming one and all to partake.