

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“JESUS, THE RELUCTANT CELEBRITY”
Mark 1:40-45
February 12, 2012
9:00 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES

Last week our subject was, Jesus Christ, Superstar. We live in a world that canonizes celebrity. It no longer matters how much a person has accomplished or how much they have contributed to society. All you have to do to become famous in today’s world is to keep yourself in front of the media.

There are people who are famous simply for being famous. People like Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie. Also, there are people like Brandon Davis, Kim Kardashian, Jack and Kelly Osborne (Ozzy’s kids) and Kevin Federline, Britney Spears’ ex for those of you who don’t read People’s Magazine. These are people who are famous simply for being famous.

A few years ago there was a 310-pound defensive tackle for the Chicago Bears who suddenly became a national celebrity. His name was William **“The Refrigerator”** Perry. He was a big guy. In a four-week period, he did the unthinkable. He stepped out of his role as a lineman and ran the ball successfully for yardage. He even caught a pass for a touchdown. Then he ran for another touchdown. It was the first time a defensive tackle had ever, in the history of football, been given the ball to carry to make a touchdown. Sports fans were captivated by this extraordinary event which, for many people, put the fun back in football. Perry became a television star, appearing on the **“Tonight”** show, the **“Today”** show, and the nightly network news shows. There were as many as one hundred requests per day for endorsements, and an extra \$750,000 in fees came his way.

Meanwhile his mother said, **“I know he was good, but I don’t think he’s that good.”** And his wife said, **“This was great for a while, but now it’s ridiculous. It’s gotten out of hand.”** [It’s hard to impress the women in your life.]

Perry himself said, **“As fast as it comes, that’s how fast it goes.”** He was right. (1) William **“The Refrigerator”** Perry is quickly being forgotten. But he had more than his fifteen minutes of fame. For a while, he was a genuine celebrity.

Jesus did not want to be a celebrity. Just look at the scripture lesson for this morning. A man with leprosy came to him. The man got down on his knees in front of Jesus and said, **“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”**

It’s interesting. The NIV says that Jesus was **“indignant”** at this request. Other versions say he was **“filled with compassion.”** Perhaps he felt a little of both. He wanted the man with leprosy to be healed. Jesus wants everyone who is physically sick or emotionally sick, to be healed. He wants everyone who is hurting in any area of life to be released from that hurt. Maybe you’re hurting financially as you watch the equity in your house drop, or hurting emotionally as you watch your children turn their backs on you. People hurt in a multitude of ways, and none of it is what Christ desires for us. We need to believe that. It is not God’s will for us to have leprosy, or cancer, or heart problems, or whatever pain we may have. God’s will for us is good. It is not God’s will for anyone to suffer. That’s why God gave us the gift of medical science. God wants us to live free from disease.

But Christ did not come into the world to be a medical doctor or a psychologist. There was no way for Christ, while he was confined in a physical body, to heal everyone who needed him. There were not enough hours in a day or a week or a lifetime. That does not mean that he was not willing. It was simply a practical impossibility. Besides, as I mentioned last week, healing individuals was not his primary mission. He didn’t want people to suffer, but neither did he want to be lured away from his primary purpose. His primary mission was to establish the kingdom of God in our midst. His primary mission was to preach and to teach and to instruct his disciples so that they might carry on his work when he was gone.

But notice what happens in this encounter with the man with the disease of leprosy. The man says, **“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”**

And Jesus reaches out his hand and touches the man and says, **“I am willing, Be clean!”**

Immediately the leprosy left the man and he was cleansed. But notice what happens next. Jesus sent him away with these words: **“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”**

And what does he do? He does the exact opposite of what Jesus asks him to do. Mark tells us, ***“Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.”*** And this is what happened: ***“As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.”***

Remember as I said last week, Jesus experienced a rather lengthy period of popularity. He could no longer enter a town openly! Here was his real mission to spread the good news of the coming kingdom, but his success as a healer stood in the way of what he was sent to do. Perhaps that is the reason that nine times in the Gospels particularly in the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells people to keep quiet about who he is or what he’s done for them.

For example, Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. It was one of the most amazing miracles in history. But what does he do? Mark says he gave strict orders not to let anyone know about it (5:35-43).

He healed a man who could not speak or hear. Then he tells the man not to tell anyone. Think about that for a moment. Here is a man who had been deaf and mute, perhaps all his life, who is now able to hear and talk, and Jesus tells him not to tell anyone how it happened. That might be a little unrealistic.

But it wasn’t just the people he healed. In Matthew 16:20 we read, ***“Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.”*** And again, in Mark 9:9 following that spectacular event on the Mount of the Transfiguration the Bible says, ***“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”***

The last thing Jesus wanted was to be a celebrity, but celebrity came to him. And in one sense, celebrity killed him. The more the authorities knew about him the more they feared him. He was a threat to all the powers that be. It would have been best for him if he had kept a low profile. Don’t rock the boat. Go with the flow. He had not come into the world to be a physician but to tell the world about God’s love.

Still, when he was confronted with someone who was hurting he could not help but heal. Why? Because he cared! You can hear it in his response to the leper who said, ***“If you will, you can make me clean.”*** ***“I am willing,”*** Jesus says.

Jesus cared about people and so must we. Even if it gave him less time for preaching and teaching; even if it ultimately cost him his life, he could not pass by someone who was hurting. Can we? Do we?

Jesus could not pass by people who were hurting, and they in turn could not help talking about the wonderful things he had done for them. The more they talked, the more of their friends came to Jesus as well. Jesus simply cared too much for his own good and people who encountered him were so touched by him they simply could not keep it to themselves even when he told them to be quiet.

Can we understand that? If Christ has touched your life, how can you be quiet about it? When people have something important happen in their lives they want to share it. Besides, they were but following Christ's example. He responded to them with love and healed them, and they wanted to pass the news of his power to their friends so that they could be healed, too.

Jesus touched lives! Has he touched yours? He touched me!

1. Gilbert Brim, *Ambition* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).