

Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 17:11-19

Aim of Lesson

To show the power of Jesus to cure the incurable, and to show that Jesus is pleased when men give glory to God.

Background study

Leviticus 13:14; Deuteronomy 24:8; Numbers 5:1-4; Matthew 11:4-5; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16.

Suggested outline of lesson

It is important to know something about the terrible disease of leprosy in order to be able to convey to the children both the depth of Jesus' love and compassion, and the importance of the cure for the formerly incurable leper. There are several different types of the disease. The one prevalent in tropical countries today is typified by deformities of hands and feet and responds to treatment.

By contrast, the leprosy described in the Bible struck terror and loathing into the hearts of people who lived in and around Palestine: it affected the skin and was highly contagious. There was no treatment, and the disease was very prevalent at that time. Because it spread quickly there were very strict regulations in the law of Moses concerning its diagnosis and isolation. Leviticus 13 tells us something of the nature of the disease. The progressive symptoms were white swellings or eruptions of the skin, raw bleeding flesh and hair turning white in the area of the affected skin. A leper was commanded to wear torn clothes, have his or her hair hanging loose, cover the upper lip and cry: "Unclean, unclean". Lepers were excluded from the camp or city and, in the time of Jesus, they were forced to live in caves beyond the city walls. The only way in which they stayed alive was by eating food which relatives would leave for them at a safe distance. On the occasions when lepers came near the towns, they would be looked at with horror and revulsion, and healthy people would keep a safe distance from them. It takes little imagination to realize what a wretched, lonely and hopeless life was led by those afflicted.

Use some of the above information to introduce this lesson, in an attempt to help the children imagine both the feelings of the lepers and the reactions of other people to the diseased. Follow this by describing the way in which Jesus was always thronged by crowds of people wanting to hear his preaching, and even more wanting to be cured of their various illnesses. Suggest the way in which the crowd would have recoiled in fear and revulsion as the leper made himself known. This man had such faith that Jesus could cure him that he felt confident in mingling with the crowd. Though he was sure Jesus could cure him, he did not assume that he would. Humbly he knelt before Jesus in praise and supplication. In marked contrast to the reaction of the crowd, Jesus stepped forward and touched the untouchable man, and the effect was immediate. Emphasize what that touch meant to the leper. It was a very long time since anyone had approached, let alone touched, him. Ask the children to suggest what the man's feelings would have been (joy, relief and gratitude), how the crowd would have reacted, and what it meant to Jesus. Ask what the man would have wanted to do first. It would have been natural for him to want to run home and to share his joy with his family and friends, or anyone who would listen. Jesus had to curb his excitement and remind him that first he must do what the law required.

Word must have spread among the colonies of lepers that the man Jesus could cure the disease. Many months later, when Jesus was entering a village on his way to Jerusalem, ten lepers, who must have heard that he was coming, were waiting for him. Describe the compassion and healing power of Jesus and his ready response to their plea. Not doubting his authority, they followed his instructions and set off to find the priests. Imagine their overwhelming joy as they became aware of having been healed. Excitedly they examined each other's healthy skin. No longer were they condemned to the pain of disease and the misery of isolation, but were free to return to the pleasures of normal family life. Now they quickened their pace, anxious to waste no time in having their cure confirmed by the priests.

Ask the children whether they think there was anything the lepers had forgotten to do. Guide the children to recognize that they had received the precious gift of health and that gratitude should have been their first reaction. Point out the joy that Jesus felt when one man returned to thank him and to praise God, and his disappointment that nine out of ten had failed to do this. The power of Jesus had combined with the faith of men to effect the miracle.

Relevance to the children's lives

How happy Jesus was when the man he had healed remembered to thank him and to praise God. What things should we be thankful for? To whom should we say 'thank you'? Jesus had the power to make the lepers better. He can also make people better-behaved, if they ask for his help. (The concept of sin as a form of uncleanness can be developed here, at your discretion. Much will depend on the maturity of the children.)

Worksheets

The code reads 'A man with leprosy came and knelt before Jesus and asked him to cure him. Jesus touched him and immediately he was cured. Another time ten men who were lepers met Jesus; they stood at a distance and called to him to have pity on them. He told them to show themselves to the priests. As they went they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet, thanking him.'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, when we see people who are ill, teach us to remember them in our prayers. Thank you for good health. Teach us always to be grateful for your care, and help us to be better people. Amen.

Memory verse

"One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice" (Luke 17:15).