

Monday, April 3 – Read Luke 5:12-16. The words “Jesus reached out his hand, and touched him” may not seem odd. But it was a stunning act. In that day, most skin diseases were lumped together as “leprosy.” Leviticus 13-14 called for isolating those who had them so as not to spread the disease. Most people felt fear and revulsion for these sufferers, and avoided all contact. But Jesus touched the man, and said, “I do want to. Be clean.” Today we know more about leprosy and other skin diseases, and “lepers” don’t wear signs that say “unclean.” But social shunning still goes on in 2017. We shun people based on race, age, gender, socio-economic or educational level, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, even personal quirks, political beliefs, or looks. Have you ever been shunned? Have you shunned someone else? How is God asking you to live up to Jesus’ example in touching the leper today? Jesus sent the man to follow the ritual from Leviticus 14 for being declared clean and able to rejoin his community. Limited as it seems to us, that was the best equivalent then of a clean medical bill of health. In what ways does God’s power work in and through the medical, counseling and other professions today? How can human wisdom work with, rather than against, God’s healing power?

Tuesday, April 4 – Read John 4:3-26. Verse 3 said Jesus “had to go through Samaria.” Pastor Roger Frederickson notes that “he did not need to save the three days He could gain by passing through this hostile province rather than crossing the river and going up the eastern desert route. There did not seem to be urgent needs in Galilee ... He knew the ... spiritual hunger of the Samaritan people, and the Father had sent Him into the whole world—not just part of it. He could not avoid these people in spite of the long history of resentment and antagonism between Jews and Samaritans.” Jesus sat down to rest by Jacob’s well. A lone woman, an outcast even among the Samaritans, came to the well, and saw a Jewish rabbi there. Trace how Jesus turned this awkward encounter into a life-changing conversation. How did he disarm suspicion and fear? At what points was he straightforward and direct? Who are the people “at the well” that you’re not sure how to approach about Jesus? The woman tried to keep the conversation abstract and impersonal, especially in verse 20. But Jesus would not be side-tracked—he kept reaching for her heart. What issues or questions function at times to help you keep God “at a distance,” an interesting subject for study and discussion rather than a life-changing Savior and Lord?

Wednesday, April 5 – Read John 4:27-42. The effects of Jesus' talk with the woman at the well reached far beyond her life. She dashed into town, told everyone about her visit and asked, "Could this man be the Christ?" (verse 29). And Jesus taught his disciples, who seemed to think no sharing could do any good in this hostile territory, an important lesson about spiritual vision. "Open your eyes," he said, "and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest" (verse 35). Your assignment: reach out to a hostile area with the good news of God's love. What kind of person would you choose for the task? Jesus chose a friendless, outcast woman, who was effective mainly by saying, "Come and see." Do you allow your limitations to block you from sharing what Christ means to you? Consider the woman at the well, and ask God in what ways you can be a channel of Christ's love today. The townspeople came, and listened to Jesus. In the end they said, "We have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world" (verse 42). How can you hear the voice of Jesus for yourself today? What spiritual practices help you "hear for yourself" Christ's call on your life?

Thursday, April 6 – Read Matthew 9:9-13. Israelites saw their countrymen who collected Roman taxes as traitors and outcasts. Rome's laws let them get rich by overcharging people. But Jesus didn't see Matthew as an outcast—he saw one of his "sheep" in need of his inclusive love (Luke 15:1-7). He called Matthew to "Follow me," and Matthew left his predatory work and wealth behind to follow Jesus. The Pharisees were incensed, but Jesus said they failed to grasp that God is, above all, a God of mercy and grace. Who do you identify with in this passage? The outcast Matthew? The judgmental Pharisees? The merciful, gracious Jesus? Perhaps at times all three? How can you grow in your ability to see people not through the filters of judgment, prejudice and fear, but through the loving, merciful eyes of Jesus? We are called to be the body of Jesus Christ and to love and serve in his name (Romans 12:3-18). At Covenant and in the community, there are many available mission/service opportunities. In what specific way(s) will you choose to be the loving, grace-filled hands and feet of Jesus?

Friday, April 7 – Read Luke 19:1-10. Another outcast Jew (Zacchaeus, "a ruler among tax collectors") went to great lengths to see Jesus: "he climbed up a sycamore tree." Jesus very publicly said, "Zacchaeus, come down—I must stay in your home today." Jesus bucked general social rules by inviting himself into a personal relationship with this outcast. To those who grumbled he said that he "came to seek and save the lost." (Zacchaeus sought Jesus, only to find that Jesus was seeking him!) In Zacchaeus' response to Jesus we see a heart change. Suddenly the value God places on people became more important to him than "stuff." It's been said that on the one hand, Jesus offers "invitation" to those who feel lost and in need of him, and on the other hand "challenge" to those who feel no need of him. Where are you on this spectrum? Ask God to open your eyes to your need of Christ in your life as Lord and Savior. Ask for courage to accept Christ's offer to "stay in your home today," freeing you from reliance on external riches to make room for the inner riches only Christ can give you.