

## "ON HIS KNEES"

Mark 1:40-45

First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

As we move into the Season of Advent this week, we also move from the Gospel of Matthew to the Gospel of Mark. In Mark, we see Jesus right away as a caretaker and a caregiver for the most marginalized of the persons of his day. Unlike Matthew, Mark is unconcerned with law; instead, his Jesus is all about how we care for others. Today's reading is from Mark 1, beginning with the 40<sup>th</sup> verse. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church:

*A leper came to him, begging on his knees, "If you want to, you can cleanse me."*

*Deeply moved, Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, "I want to. Be clean." Then and there the leprosy was gone, his skin smooth and healthy. Jesus dismissed him with strict orders:*

*"Say nothing to anyone. Take the offering for cleansing that Moses prescribed and present yourself to the priest. This will validate your healing to the people." But as soon as the man was out of earshot, he told everyone he met what had happened, spreading the news all over*

*town. So, Jesus kept to out-of-the-way places, no longer able to move freely in and out of the city. But people found him, and came from all over.*

Here ends the Gospel lesson. May God add a blessing to these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

Joe and Steve will here sing and play Sam Cooke's Civil Rights Era anthem, "A Change Is Gonna Come."

I was born by the river in a little tent  
Oh and just like the river I've been running ev'r since  
It's been a long time, a long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to die  
'Cause I don't know what's up there, beyond the sky  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

I go to the [river] and I go down town  
Somebody keep tellin' me don't hang around  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

Then I go to my brother  
And I say brother help me please  
But he winds up knockin' me  
Back down on my knees, oh  
There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will

*[I will step out from behind them speaking in the voice of the leper:]*

I used to be called Selvenia. I used to have flowing, silky black hair, eyes that were alive with joy and anticipation, and feet that danced easily and often.

My name was Selvenia and I had a family. I had a mother who held me when winter's cold blew in through the window of our shelter causing me to shiver and stay awake nights. I had a father who recited the stories of the ancients to my brothers and me outside by the firepit.

My brother and I used to share the chores of the household, trading gentle teasing back and forth. Our family ate together after we said our prayers together. I was happy. I belonged. I was somebody. I had a name, and God-of-Abraham knew me. My name was Selvenia and I had a family.

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It started as just some itching on my feet and my hands. Then the blisters started forming. On my legs. On my fingers. Above my eyes. In my nose and mouth. When I showed myself to my mother, she was speechlessly horrified. She stared into my eyes with hers, and then the tears flowed. I was confused. Though she didn't say a word, I knew something big was happening.

She emptied out an old rag that held her stitching work, hastily shoving into it my two garments and my shawl, her hairbrush, and a

couple of coins. She gave me a piece of the family's bread and a fish, and then tied it all up in a knot. Slowly and painfully, she took her braided necklace off her neck and placed it around mine. I had never seen her without that necklace.

It was all a blur. She said something to my brother, and then she turned away from me. I have not seen her since. My brother took me gently by the elbow, avoiding my questions and my growing sense of panic. As I yelled for my mother, he led me outside the door of our sleeping place, down the street to the river where we had endlessly played, over the bridge, to...the leper colony.

I knew of the leper colony, for I had been scolded by my father never to go near there, that it was an unclean place, a place where sick people went to die. I had seen people with the disease. It was awful. I had heard the lepers begging for food, suffering from their sores and in their despair. The leper colony was a place where hope had no home. It was then that I understood what was happening to me.

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My brother left me there. He turned his back to me and without a word at all, he quickly shuffled away. I had been Selvenia of the house of Jarrod, proud daughter and sister, not a daughter of a wealthy family, but a person rich in connection and relationship and hope. And then I was not.

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It is the morning and I am feeling miserable—achy and itchy and dirty. For weeks now I have slept on the hard ground amongst the other nameless, faceless lepers living out their slow-moving death sentences. If someone takes pity on me, I will eat this day—that is, if someone does not steal my food while I look the other way. I have seen my brothers down by the river, but they have not recognized me and I have no strength of heart or body to call out to them. They just walk on by.

No, there is no hope here in the leper colony. There is no friendship, no family, and no guarantee that the sun will warm me tomorrow.

### *Joe and Steve sing*

Then I go to my brother  
And I say brother help me please  
But he winds up knockin' me  
Back down on my knees, oh

There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will

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My attention this morning is drawn to a commotion occurring just down the lane. A man I have not seen before is walking along in the middle of us lepers, touching us and comforting us as would a person of

prayer, as would an angel of mercy. Once in a while, we have been visited by someone who hands out to us stale bread or extra fish or cheese, but this man is, well, *different*.

There is an energy around him. I can't quite describe it, but I am drawn to it. I am suddenly *hopeful*, even though I have forgotten what hope feels like. "A change is gonna come," I hear the wind whisper in my ear. "It's been a long time coming, but change is gonna come."

As he comes near, I scuffle to him on my knees. I can't walk on my feet any more due to the blisters that torment me there. "Please, Lord, please have mercy on me, Sir," I blurt out. "If you want to, I believe that you can make me well."

The man looks into my eyes. He *actually* looks directly into my eyes. No one ever looks into my eyes anymore. When I lost my name and my family, I lost that, too. People stopped looking into my eyes. They looked at me, in horror, they did that. I must have looked like a monster. From what I could see, I was a sight.

But this man *looked* into my eyes with a gentle spirit, with a *knowing* heart. And then he did something I really did not expect. In fact, I never expected it ever again. He *touched* my face! He cupped my chin and lifted my eyes to his, saying gently, "I *do* choose. I choose you, *Selvenia*. I choose to make you well."

It was though the energy of the Lord God itself coursed through my whole body. I looked around to see a crowd gathering around me, gaping and whispering, some of them falling to their knees, too. And the strangest sign met me and told me that I was healing, that I was healed. They were looking into my eyes. They were seeing a person restored right before them, and that person was me.

I tell you, it was pandemonium. I stood up with his help. Some people called him "Jesus" and some called him "Messiah." Some couldn't talk at all. I vaguely remember this Jesus telling me to keep quiet about what he had done for me, but all I could think to do was to praise God and then run home to my mother and father and brothers, screaming all the way about how the Spirit-man had healed me.

"I am Selvenia," I cried. "I am a child of God and my prayer has been answered." I believed that change was gonna come. I held on to hope and Jesus found me where I was, lost, afraid, barely alive. He found me where I was and because I believed he would, he healed me and I am whole again. I am home again. My mother has enfolded me again in her arms and my father has presented me again in the synagogue. My brothers are singing great prayers of joy that their sister is whole again.

Praise God! I can't keep quiet about this great thing that Jesus has done! I hope others will find healing, too. I hope the world will be changed because of this man...

*May It Be So*

*Joe and Steve sing the last verse again*

There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will