

Jesus Is Willing

✠ To make us clean (vv.40-42)

✠ To guide our lives (vv.43-45)

In the name of Jesus, our compassionate and willing Savior, kindly cleansed saints of God:

Isn't this true? One of the hardest things about being a Christian is to be willing. Right away we think of being willing to do things for God. But are we willing to let Him do for us? Think of today's Scripture lessons. Amos the prophet in our Old Testament Lesson willingly followed God's command to preach up north, but the wicked priest Amaziah was not willing to hear what God had done. The Twelve disciples were willing to go on a mission journey in our Gospel Lesson without supplies. Are we willing to trust God's promise and provision in sickness and in health, in loss of job or wealth? First, before we could be willing to do anything for God, our Second Lesson shows God was loving us from all eternity.

See how the dear Holy Spirit inspires our willing response to God's Word? Yes, He wants us to thank and praise God for faithful pastors and be His willing witnesses at work and play. But first, He wants us to see this, to revel in this, to rejoice from the bottom of our hearts: **Jesus Is Willing**....

✠ To make us clean (vv.40-44)

It was living death to be a leper then as now. I'll never forget the first time I saw one, or rather, smelled one in China. He was lying at the gate to Thanksgiving Church in Wuhan. I had never seen a body covered with flies, much less a living person. But he held out his hands begging, and it broke your heart. We wanted to help, but the pastor told us the man's relatives just took the money for themselves. He was like an endless credit card for them. Willing Christians found other ways to help him.

Now imagine you're walking with Jesus and His disciples when a leper runs up. The law of Moses kept lepers in quarantine. They were physically and ceremonially "unclean," which meant they had to live apart from society. Regulations identified leprosy as reddish skin being eaten away. There was no cure like penicillin today. Jewish historian Josephus tells us people usually threw rocks and dirt at lepers if they came anywhere close. No one wanted to be "unclean." No one was willing or able to help.

So here's the first miracle: "***A man with leprosy came to him....***" That was unprecedented, even illegal. But somehow this leper had heard about Jesus' miracles and, more importantly, how Jesus was **Willing** to help the helpless and demon possessed. Desperate, this "***man with leprosy came to [Jesus] and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'***"

What keeps you from coming to Jesus? Are you full of doubt that He would want to help you? Are you afraid He might not be able? Is it pride that keeps you from begging on your knees to God? Very few would step away, maybe get upwind of the man and at best say some nice words. Most would just run away. But not Jesus. "***Filled with compassion,***" He did the unthinkable. "***Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.***" He is not at all worried about highly contagious disease or ceremonial uncleanness. How long had it been since anyone touched this leper? Then come the kindest words of all from our Savior's lips: "***I am willing....Be clean!***" Nor was this a nice wish by a pious preacher. What Jesus said actually happened: "***Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.***"

Most of us would rather see ourselves as Jesus here, not as the leper. We want to be the helpers, so we give to charity. But have we complained or been unwilling to help our neighbor or speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves? Do we sometimes think we can just stay away and work on our own problems and hope things will get better on their own? Here's help from our *Lutheran Confessions* which picture sin like leprosy in Luther's *Large Catechism*:

*But the fact that we do not feel our sinfulness shows that our condition is much worse than [Paul's in Romans 7:18]. For it is a sign that our flesh is leprous and does not feel anything even though the disease is raging in us and eating our life away. If sin has deadened you so completely, you better believe the Scripture as it pronounces God's verdict against you. In short, the less you feel your sins and flaws, the more reason you have to go to the Sacrament to seek a remedy.*¹

The leper came to Jesus and begged. Good! Let's come too. But are we willing to trust God...?

† To guide our lives (vv.43-45)

Two questions about Jesus' orders here: First of all, why ***"go show yourself to the priest"*** when Jesus Himself had obviously done a good job? Your skin is restored. You don't hurt all over anymore. And you smell as fresh as an Irish spring! So what's this all about? ***"Offer the sacrifices Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them."*** Simple answer: Jesus had not yet fulfilled the law of Moses by His perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. He wanted the Jewish high priest to hear about the miracle. Jesus ordered the man to go through the cleansing ritual to be restored publicly to his place among God's people. The priest was his target audience by God's command.

But here's a bigger question. Jesus gave a strong warning: ***"See that you don't tell this to anyone."*** More literally, "Say absolutely nothing to anyone at all!" Did the man think, "What will it hurt if I tell people about this great rabbi from Nazareth?" Did overflowing gratitude get the best of him?

Emotions can be the worst enemy of faith. Our sinful heart wants the opposite of God ever since Adam's fall into sin. Remember how Adam and Eve would not admit their sin, but blamed each other and God instead? "Willing" is not in the vocabulary of our sin-born nature. And if we run off to serve God based on our emotions, we end up doing more harm than good. Mark reports that because the healed leper ***"went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news..., Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places."*** Emotionalism does God no favors.

Jesus was **Willing** to help and heal the leper, knowing he would hinder His ministry for a time. As our perfect Substitute under God's law, **Jesus Is Willing – To make us clean and To guide our lives.**

Remember God's invitation through James Montgomery? ***"Come to Calvary's holy mountain"*** in order to ***"wash your robes and make them white...From the leprosy of sin"*** (CW 106:2). In penitential Psalm 51:1, Bathsheba's adulterer, King David, pleads for God's mercy: ***"Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."*** Hyssop was there at Calvary when they held the sponge up to Jesus' mouth on a hyssop plant. God's Word gives complete healing of body and soul. Relieved of our burdens at the cross of great David's greater Son, we echo the penitent king: ***"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; he redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion."*** (Psalm 103:2f) God's great compassion in Christ is all the power we need to make us willing too.

Three Korean workmen laboring in China in the early 1880's, conspired to bring the Bible into Korea in spite of persecution and death to previous missionaries. They drew straws to see who would get the honor. The first one hid the Bible in his luggage, but was searched and killed at border. The second tore his Bible and hid the pages throughout his luggage. He too was searched and beheaded by border guards. The third rolled each page, then wove them into a rope to tie up his belongings. He was searched, but not found out. Back home in Korea, he unraveled the rope and ironed each page flat. He shared his reassembled Bible with many. When Christian missionaries came in the late 1880's, God's Word had already won hearts all over Korea. Rejoice because **Jesus Is Willing**. By His love we are willing too. Amen.

¹ Janzow, F. Samuel. *Luther's Large Catechism – A Contemporary Translation with Study Questions*. CPH, St. Louis, MO, 1978, p. 120.