
A Quest for Inclusion: A Narrative Theological Reflection on the Story of Jesus Healing a Leper (Mark 1:40-45)

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Introduction

This essay follows a narrative theological reading of Mark 1:40-45. In this gospel pericope, Mark narrates the story of Jesus healing a leper. My aim is to discover the deeper meaning of this Markan text, and its implications for the Caribbean Church and ecclesial communities. I will therefore address the following central question: “What can be learned from a narrative reading of the story of Jesus healing a leper, that may contribute to turning the tide for individuals at the receiving end during the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises?” After analyzing the Markan text, I will relate some findings to several challenges facing the church in the Caribbean.¹

What is this story about?

At first glance, this story seems to be about a miraculous healing. This impression is reinforced by what happens in the preceding verses and what follows immediately thereafter (2:1-12). Mark first narrates how Jesus “heals” a man who is possessed by an unclean spirit (vv. 24-26). It is interesting to note here that this episode occurs in a synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath! Immediately hereafter Jesus cures Peter’s mother-in-law who was stricken by fever (vv. 29-31). That very same day after sunset Jesus continues his healing ministry. “That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were sick with diseases of one kind or another; he also drove out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was” (1:32-34).

Furthermore, Mark mentions in one sentence (v. 39), that precedes the story about the healing of the leper, how Jesus continues his preaching and healing ministry in the Galilean synagogues, by driving out devils. Our actual story is then followed by the one in which Jesus cures a paralytic (2:1-12). So, one may be

1. This essay is an adapted version of an earlier unpublished version of which a summarized video presentation was held at the virtual Biennial Conference on Theology in the Caribbean Today (CTCT) from 8-12 November, 2021. The theme of this conference was “The Covid Effect: Turning the Tide”. All biblical citations in this essay are taken from the online version of The New Jerusalem Bible, <https://www.bibliacatolica.com.br/new-jerusalem-bible/mark/1/> [retrieved 22 October 2021]

What can be learned from a narrative reading of the story of Jesus healing a leper, that may contribute to turning the tide for individuals at the receiving end during the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises?

inclined to view the story in Mark 1:40-45 as just one of the many healing stories since it shares the same theme with its surrounding stories. But is it really?

To arrive at a deeper understanding of what this story is about we need to do two things: First, we must read the story in its larger context. Second, we must seek to apply that healing process, as unfolded in this story, to ourselves.

The larger context: the kingdom of God

One way to establish the larger context of the story is by focusing on the *leitmotiv* in the gospel narrative. Therefore, it is necessary to follow Jesus on his ministry and take a closer look at the message he proclaims. From the beginning of the gospel narrative Mark sets the tone by emphasizing the urgency and immediacy of what is close at hand. The first thing Jesus does—according to Mark—at the beginning of his public ministry is to travel to Galilee. Mark notes: “There he proclaimed the gospel from God saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel” (1:14b-15).” This proclamation stands at the very beginning and at the center of Jesus’ public ministry. It plays out in Jesus’ words and deeds throughout the gospel narrative. God’s kingdom, as Jesus reveals, contradicts all human standards by its inverted values. In God’s kingdom, “who wants to save his life will lose it” (8:35), and “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all (9:35).” And “(M)any who are first will be last, and the last, first” (10:31).

Another important feature of the kingdom of God is that it appeals to human engagement. What comes immediately after

Jesus' first proclamation is a summons to follow him. A call to discipleship, to which Simon, his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John are the first to answer, not knowing what ultimately awaits them. Later Jesus would declare: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34). According to New Testament scholar James Aageson, for Mark the implications of Jesus' proclamation reach as far as to follow him to the cross, and those are "intense and unrelenting."²

In Mark's gospel narrative it becomes clear that God's kingdom is a radically different kingdom compared to one measured according to human standards. It is a world where tax collectors and sinners get a seat at the table (2:15-16). When confronted with this anomaly Jesus responds succinctly: "I came to call not the upright, but sinners (2:17b)." On this account another dimension of the kingdom of God is revealed: its inclusive character. It is open to everyone—for who can claim to be without sin?—but most importantly to those who are stripped of their humanity, condemned to live peripheral lives. Healing the leper was Jesus' way to demonstrate how God's kingdom or the reign of God—both represented in Greek by the words *basileia tou theou*—becomes incarnate in human life. It is said that Mark has made both meanings the core of Jesus' message. And a necessary condition for God's kingdom, or for re-establishing his reign on earth was to restore justice, especially for those who, by no fault of their own, had become victims to the social, political, and religious status quo behind them.³

Since identifying Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God as the *leitmotiv* throughout Mark's gospel, Christians are compelled to take a stance in support of its realization here and now. Therefore, the Caribbean church must be at the center of restoring justice for those who suffer injustice from the hands of the powerful and the mighty, as well as from fellow citizens in the social, political, economic, and religious echelons.

Called to follow Jesus

If it is true that Christians are called to follow Jesus on his journey, (i.e., to discipleship), then they need to exert themselves to live up to the kind of relationship that qualifies one for that journey. A personal relationship with Jesus can never be without obligations. Mark narrates that even those who share kinship with Jesus are measured by the same standard. When told that his mother and brothers were looking for him, Jesus replied: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those sitting in a circle round him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and

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mother" (3:33-35).

This is a crucial expansion of the circle of disciples. Proclaiming God's kingdom and engaging with its realization no longer rests on the shoulders of the "Twelve" called to discipleship. By using an entirely different criterion for kinship—one that goes beyond family bloodline—Jesus redefines the nature of "family" or, in the words of Aageson, "the nature of the emerging community of those who follow Christ on the journey."⁴ Therefore discipleship, or rather being a Christian, becomes inextricably bound with doing the will of God. That latter plays out in Jesus' teachings, in his words and actions. It plays out in his healing a leper, culminating with his death on the cross and his resurrection.

This observation attaches implications to the notion of discipleship. It entails among others, a quest for including the marginalized. It is my contention therefore that Mark 1:40-45 reflects more than just a miraculous healing. At a deeper level it is a story of inclusion for the sake of the kingdom of God. God's reign on earth becomes rooted where those who are ignored and marginalized are welcomed and included in ecclesial communities and receive a seat at the table.

Apart from aspiring a personal relationship with Jesus, discipleship by nature also entails, on the part of the Christian believer, a moral and faithful engagement with the world. It is incumbent upon Christians to search their own inner spirit as part of the process of following Christ. That "makes us aware of where we stand and where we would really be leprous or unclean in the eyes of God."⁵ After encountering Christ's unconditional and self-giving love on a personal level "we will then approach those whom we would naturally flee from and those whom we are not interested in, so that they too can, as it were, be revived

2. J. W. Aageson, "The Gospel of Mark: A Narrative Theology," in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 47 (October 2020), 4.

3. G. Hoekveld-Meijer, "Het Evangelie volgens Markus: Kwetsbaar (The Gospel According to Mark: Vulnerable)," in *De Bijbel Spiritueel: Bronnen van geestelijk leven in de Bijbelse geschriften (The Bible Spiritual: Sources of Spiritual Life in the Biblical Scriptures)*, eds. F. Maas et al. (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2004), 544.

4. Aageson, "The Gospel of Mark," 5.

5. Henri Raemdonck, *Evangeliepeilingen: Geloofsverdieping voor de zondagen en feesten (Gospel Surveys: Deepening the Faith for Sundays and feasts)* (Antwerpen: Halewijn, 2003), 455.

and experience something of God's merciful compassion in and through our Christian walk of life."⁶

Now that I have argued that Mark 1:40-45 echoes the gospel imperative to include and serve those who are ignored and marginalized for the sake of God's kingdom (cf. Matt 25:45), I will further assess how this imperative plays out in the Caribbean church.

Contemporary forms of leprosy in the Caribbean

Despite enormous medical and scientific developments, leprosy still exists in the Caribbean.⁷ Recent PAHO/WHO statistics prove its existence in twenty-four countries of the Americas. However, my intent regards analogous forms of leprosy that impact people in more or less likewise manners as in the time of Jesus, where social ostracism and separation from friends and family ensued from this horrific disease.⁸

In fact, I dare to say that the experience of Caribbean peoples is ingrained with "systemic leprosy," seeing the region's history of slavery, colonialism, and indentured labor. For a great part of their history, Caribbean peoples suffered marginalization, injustice, horrific violence, forced labor, and death. In what follows, I will briefly describe the historical context, after which I will give two examples of groups of people in the Caribbean who continue to suffer from violence. I will also portray these examples as analogous forms of leprosy. And in closing I will revisit Mark 1:40-45 to highlight a few essential points and relate those to the question of inclusion within ecclesial communities in the Caribbean.

A disconnected people

In their 2003 Pastoral Letter "Justice and Peace Shall Embrace," the bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) respond to the existing climate of crime and violence that for centuries has had its grip on the Caribbean region. In that Letter the AEC bishops seem to link the widespread and increasing crime and violence to the history of the Caribbean people,⁹ which "has been a story of the long struggle for freedom: emancipation from the oppression of slavery, independence from colonial powers for self-determination. It has often been a painful story, filled with injustice, bloodshed and suffering for its people of many

6. Raemdonck, *Gospel Surveys*, 455.

7. See: C. Franco-Paredes et al., "Leprosy in Latin America and the Caribbean: Burden of Disease and Approaches for Elimination," in *Neglected Tropical Diseases - Latin America and the Caribbean*, eds. C. Franco-Paredes and J. Santos-Preciado (Vienna: Springer, 2015).

8. S. Farren, "Jesus' Healing of the Leper Is a Message for Our Ministry," *Health Progress* 83 (May-June 2002), 72.

9. Donald Chambers has reconstructed the bishops' argument; in one of the elements, he suggests the following: "Crime happens because criminal violence takes away the dignity of the human person, and therefore a return to the situation of slavery and colonialism that previously existed in the region." See his "Justice and Peace Shall Embrace: The AEC Pastoral on Crime and Violence," in *Justice and Peace in a Renewed Caribbean: Contemporary Catholic Reflections*, eds. A. Perkins et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 170.

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origins."¹⁰ It is the story of a disconnected people whose ancestors from America (Native-Americans), Africa, Asia, and Europe (Irish indentured servants of Barbados and Jamaica) were uprooted, kidnapped, sold, or betrayed. Recent post-colonial studies suggest that the acts of violence committed during the colonial past still have repercussions for contemporary Caribbean societies plagued by widespread violence.¹¹

In his comment on this pastoral letter Fr. Donald Chamber, the current General Secretary of the AEC, affirms that even though the bishops "did not propose any new insights, theological or sociological," they still "reinforced the message that the Christian faith ought to be a transforming agent in a context of crime and violence."¹² For him this pastoral letter "was a concerted effort to describe and analyze the social reality of the Caribbean from the perspective of the peoples of the Caribbean."¹³ And the desired transforming power of the Christian faith, one may add, is indispensable to heal a suffering, disconnected people, just as Jesus' transforming power was necessary to heal the leper.

In the following sections I will further illustrate how inclusion for the sake of God's kingdom can be the starting point for healing and transformation.

The LGBTQ community as contemporary lepers

Members of the LGBTQ community in the Caribbean form a particular group that can be classified as contemporary lepers. This is not to say that these members or any other person suffering from exclusion or marginalization necessarily perceive themselves as a leper. It is to say, rather, that the way others treat them is analogous to the way lepers were treated in the time of Jesus. Homosexuals,

10. Antilles Episcopal Conference of Bishops, *Justice and Peace Shall Embrace* (2003), 2, par.4 <http://aecbishops.org/crime-violence> [retrieved 22 October 2021].

11. See: Joy Degruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005).

12. Chambers, "Justice and Peace Shall Embrace," 175.

13. Chambers, "Justice and Peace Shall Embrace," 168.

for instance, face extreme difficulties with social acceptance after “coming out the closet.” They are looked down upon, experience discrimination in the labor market, and are often labelled *a priori* as child abusers. According to Lester Orville Shields there exists in the Caribbean region, a “widely expressed view that the homosexual person is particularly sinful and repulsive.” Such expressions are frequently voiced through social media, and often accompanied by grave threats, exposing and putting the homosexual person at risk. Moreover, “(T)here exists in the region revulsion at even the thought of homosexuality, and there is no hesitation in expressing condemnation of and violence against homosexuals. Trying to convince persons who are repulsed that homosexuals are human is seemingly futile.”¹⁴

The AEC’s “Statement on Homosexuality and Homosexual Behavior” (2001) also seems incapable of effecting a positive change in the Christian faithful’s attitude toward homosexuals, perhaps due to refraining from taking a clear stance for or against homosexuality.¹⁵ As a result, homosexuals either chose to remain in the closet, or courageously come out, risking social ridicule or ecclesial exclusion. The fact remains that their presence challenges (fellow) Christians to re-examine their attitude toward them; to self-assess the extent to which such attitudes contribute or reinforce a system of exclusion, be it secular or religious.

Female victims of crime and violence as contemporary lepers

Victims of crime and violence are found in every age group and across gender in the Caribbean. But females (women and girls) are twice at risk compared to males. They suffer both from the general crime and violence that affect everyone else, and from gender-based violence which mainly targets women, predominantly in domestic settings.¹⁶

From 2016 to 2019 five CARICOM Member States—Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago—conducted national surveys to measure the extent of gender-based violence. The results show that violence against women is endemic: 46 percent of women in each of these five countries have experienced at least one form of violence. The survey focused on the four forms of intimate partner violence (IPV): physical, sexual, economic, and emotional violence.¹⁷

Moreover, Rodrigues presented staggering figures related to domestic violence in Guyana from a previous survey by the Red

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Tread Research Team, conducted in 1998 with a sample of 360 women.¹⁸ Among their findings was that four out of every five respondents perceived violence in the family to be common in Guyana (76.8 percent); this was validated by 65.8 percent actual cases of domestic violence from the sample. And 32.1 percent had been sexually abused by a male relative during childhood.

Whereas in previous studies much of the reported violence against women and girls occurred domestically, recent reports demonstrate that women and girls are targeted in the wider society. In a press release of November 24, 2020, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) expressed its concern over the persistence of gender-based violence against women and girls in the region and high rates of femicide. It made the following statement: “Gender violence occurs systematically in our region. It knows no borders, affecting women and girls of all ages and taking place in all types of spaces: in workplaces, in the context of political and community participation, on transportation and in the street, in schools and educational centers, in cyberspace and—without a doubt—within homes.”¹⁹

There are two remarkable observations from research on crime and violence, conducted in Jamaica and Guyana respectively. The first is that the increased number of criminal and violent cases over several decades in Jamaica is attributed to a combination of, among others, poverty and social exclusion.²⁰ There seems to be an

14. L. O. Shields, “A Response to the Antilles Episcopal Conference ‘Statement On Homosexuality and Homosexual Behaviour’” [sic], in *Justice and Peace in a Renewed Caribbean*, eds. A. Perkins et al., 99.

15. Shields, “A Response,” 97.

16. N. Muturi and P. Donald, “Violence against Women and Girls in the Caribbean: An Intervention and Lessons Learned from Jamaica,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 52 (June, 2006), 83.

17. UN Women, “Caribbean Women Count: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub” (n.d.), <https://caribbeanwomenscount.unwomen.org/index.html> [retrieved 22 October 2021]

18. M. Rodrigues, “‘Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean’ Revisited,” in *Justice and Peace in a Renewed Caribbean*, eds. A. Perkins et al., 70.

19. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, “The Persistence of Violence against Women and Girls in the Region and Femicide, its Maximum Expression, is Troubling” (24 November 2020, citing Alicia Bárcena, ECLAC’s Executive Secretary), <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-persistence-violence-against-women-and-girls-region-and-femicide-its-maximum> [retrieved 22 October 2021]

20. H. A. McDavid et al., “Is criminal violence a non-communicable disease? Exploring the epidemiology of violence in Jamaica,” *West Indian Medical Journal* 6 (July 2011), 478–482, cited in *Justice and Peace in a Renewed Caribbean*, eds. A. Perkins et al., 17.

intrinsic and reciprocal link between these two categories. Poverty can indeed lead to social exclusion, and vice versa. These two categories are also applicable to the leper in Mark 1:40-45. Being cut off from any form of social aid keeps one in poverty. And not having the means (network or social relations, financial resources from labor) to participate in society, leads to social exclusion. If, indeed, poverty and social exclusion are among root causes of incremental crime and widespread violence in the Caribbean, then the church and all other ecclesial communities need to step up and reach out to both victims and perpetrators, to curb the web of violence. Embodying a “spirituality of inclusivity” may help to liberate those who are socially excluded. This can be a first step to pre-empting crime and violence.

The second observation comes from Rodrigues who, in discussing the Red Thread Research Team’s survey results in Guyana, notes that “approximately 40 percent of the women experiencing violence with their partner sought help (37.4 percent).”²¹ The majority of these women either went to the police (39.5 percent) or to a relative (34.2 percent). The smallest number of these women consulted a priest (2.6 percent). Furthermore, over 50 percent of the sample affirmed knowing where abused individuals could seek help. The majority of these (45.1 percent) pointed to “Help & Shelter,” a Guyanese NGO formed as a response to the high incidence of violence, alcoholism, and poverty, whereas the smallest number (5.3 percent) indicated a priest. These low percentages for a priest as representative of the church solicits research that can lead to recommendations to remove the barriers for victims, making it easier for them to share their stories in ecclesial communities.

In the following section I shall revisit Mark’s narrative of Jesus healing a leper, from which I will draw some lessons in view of more inclusivity regarding contemporary lepers in ecclesial communities throughout the Caribbean.

Revisiting Mark 1:40-45

In the story of Jesus healing a leper, the act of healing occurs rather swiftly. It took Mark just one verse for this act: *Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said to him, ‘I am willing. Be cleansed.’* (1:41). This single verse contains important lessons for ecclesial communities in the Caribbean and elsewhere, regarding developing and maintaining a “spirituality of inclusivity.” Norma Cook Everist makes some valuable observations to that respect. It first requires ecclesial communities to reflect on their role as a learning community, as a community of teachers and learners, and as a space of “encounter with the Living God,” based on what is “inspired revelation and God’s outpouring of love.”²²

For Cook Everist one important feature of ecclesial communities as learning communities is that all are teacher and learner:

21. Rodrigues, “Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean” Revisited,” 71.

22. Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 22.

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“each individual needs to be a teacher in order to be a learner, and a learner in order to be a teacher. Teachers and learners become gifts to one another, and need each other to complete one another’s teaching and learning.”²³ All individual members have gifts and roles to share, but certainly are not equally gifted. “When only one or a few are assumed to have the knowledge, the community divides between teachers and learners.”²⁴ All members are called to discipleship, irrespective of their individual gift or role. The body of Christ is built through diverse charisms and ministries. Cook Everist therefore employs the term “differently abled,” since “(b)y virtue of being a diverse creation and reassembled into one body of Christ, suffering and rejoicing together, the gifts of the Spirit can all be used.”²⁵ Cook Everist encourages members of “the (c)hurch as learning community” to examine their individual attitudes regarding those who are easily dismissed because of failing to see their full potential, as a result of, for example their impaired social skills. “By choosing to ignore any person, the teacher, as well as other learners, remain ignorant; the ignored one remains outside the learning community.”²⁶ These observations imply that ecclesial communities are not automatically in and of themselves inclusive. A “spirituality of inclusivity” must be taught, learned, prayed for, and practiced or exercised continuously by all members of the ecclesial community. In this venture the ecclesial community as a whole, and its individual members grow and learn to value “being different together.” They learn to recognize and include the hitherto untold and unheard stories of suffering, alienation, and frustration of members from the LBGTQ community and of victims of crime and violence, particularly women and children who otherwise remain invisible.²⁷ Hence it is my contention that authentic discipleship, to follow Jesus on his journey by engaging for God’s kingdom on earth, requires the embodiment of a

23. Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 23.

24. Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 35.

25. Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 35.

26. Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 37.

27. Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 323.

“spirituality of inclusivity” by and within ecclesial communities in the Caribbean and elsewhere. God’s kingdom on earth comes to fruition when such a spirituality gets rooted in the heart and mind of individual members of ecclesial communities. Against this backdrop one can read Mark 1:40-45 *narratively* with stories of inclusion and exclusion in and outside ecclesial communities on our minds. Dialoguing these stories, told and untold, heard of and unheard, with the Markan text can help us to see this story as a model for engaging God’s kingdom here and now.²⁸ As mentioned above, verse 41 forms the key for this understanding.

In Mark 1:41, four different acts are performed that effectuate the healing of the leper. These acts do not stand on their own but serve as an integral whole.

Feeling sorry: Jesus’ immediate response after the leper approaches him is charged with emotions. He is moved by the leper’s plea; his heart is touched and he feels sorry for the leper. He empathizes with the leper, because he saw and heard this person’s need, his agony and pain. Jesus recognizes that and acknowledges this person as a human being, a child of God. It is important for Christians to ask if and how they allow themselves to be touched by another’s suffering. The *Revised English Bible*, however, translates this part as: “Jesus was moved to anger.” Commenting hereupon, Farren states that Jesus’ anger was directed at a system that excluded certain people. Such an emotion would potentially prompt the person experiencing it to challenge a *system* that excludes sick and marginalized people.²⁹

Jesus stretches out his hand: This is a vivid sign of reaching out, of acceptance of the other person as a human being. In doing so, Jesus acknowledges the human dignity of the leper. He sees the whole human person behind the leper. A lesson for Christians is to consider whether they, too, are able to acknowledge the human dignity of each person.

Jesus touched him: This is a radical act, since it defies Levitical law of that time, which strictly prohibited any physical contact with lepers, for fear of contagion. This aspect is relevant against the backdrop of governmental policies to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially in the Caribbean, where there is a “culture of touching, hugging, and kissing,” refraining from touching is a sacrifice to many. Therefore, Christians are challenged to find creative ways of expressing human nearness. How far are Christians prepared to go knowing that appropriate touching makes one feel accepted but could also be risky?

Jesus said to him, ‘I am willing. Be cleansed.’ By saying this, Jesus consents for himself to be the channel of God’s outpouring love. And upon his word, “Be cleansed,” the kingdom of God manifests itself in the cleansing of the leper (cf. Luke 11:20). The leper’s life is restored and the barriers that excluded him

28. Farren, “Jesus Healing of the Leper,” 72.

29. Farren, “Jesus Healing of the Leper,” 70.

Christians should be at the forefront in seeking justice and promoting human dignity on behalf of victims of crime and violence, thereby supporting their legitimate struggle against all forms of injustice and oppression.

from the community are lifted. Christians are also called to channel God’s outpouring love to and in the world through their words and actions inspired by God’s revelation in holy Scripture. God’s outpouring love is for everybody. Jesus embodies such love. This Markan text is therefore an invitation to Christians to follow Jesus who began his ministry to building God’s kingdom on earth 2000 years ago. To whom, or to what do Christians say: “I am willing” to embody God’s reign on earth? And which barriers must be removed—both external and within ourselves—so that those who are excluded can be included in our ecclesial communities?

Conclusion

Analyzing the story of Jesus healing a leper in Mark 1:40-45, based on a narrative theological reading reveals a deeper meaning. It reveals a summon to inclusion for the sake of the kingdom of God. Jesus, by healing the leper, restores the leper’s human dignity and enables him to fully participate again in social life. The story also reveals that in Mark’s world God’s kingdom breaks down traditional boundaries and expectations, causing them to evaporate.³⁰ As such it challenges the (Christian) reader to redefine his/her position on discipleship. Moreover, the Markan text provides a mirror to look ourselves in the eye and assess in which way our words and actions include or exclude those whose stories are not told or heard.

In the Caribbean, stories of exclusion abound, seeing the historical context of colonization, slavery, and indentured labor. With such a history at the front--and back--door, Christians should be at the forefront in seeking justice and promoting human dignity on behalf of victims of crime and violence, thereby supporting their legitimate struggle against all forms of injustice and oppression. “For as long as these persist in our societies in any degree whatsoever, Christ is suffering again in his Mystical Body which is the Church. And we, as members of that same Body and Church, must be directly involved.”³¹

30. Aageson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 6.

31. Antilles Episcopal Conference of Bishops, “Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean” (1975), par.17, cited in R. A. Lewis, “From Dogma to Pastoral Compassion: A Response to ‘A Statement of the Antilles Episcopal Conference On HIV-AIDS’” (April 2005) in *Justice and Peace in a Renewed Caribbean*, eds. A. Perkins et al., 215.