

6B SML 2018
MK 1:40-45

I was young when I realized my skin was rotting away. I was sent away from home and told I would have to wear a bell around my neck and constantly scream for others to stay away from me. I was made to feel like the scourge of the human race. The decay of my body was bad. The decay of my heart and soul was worse.

It was a long, horrible day on the road like any other when I heard a clamor that overpowered my own screaming and the clanging of my bell. The man, supposedly the long awaited one, was coming. Some said he was the Messiah. So in the same way I cried out for bread or a few tossed coins, I cried out of mercy and healing.

It's hard to say if I screamed out of real belief or just the off chance that the fanatical rumors were true. Most of me expected him to avoid me like everyone else, or offer some words dripping with sentiment and false hope, or toss me a few coins to cleanse himself of the guilt of being healthy while I was ostracized. I had no idea what to expect as this was the first time I had ever crossed paths with a Messiah.

But he didn't hear me. Being a man who lived for the moment, who did not to let an opportunity pass me by, I went right up to him. I had nothing to lose. I had already lost my health and my self esteem. The worst he could do was avoid me like everyone else. But He did not avoid me. He looked at me with an acceptance and a love that I had never experienced. Then he touched me. He touched me who had not been touched since I was a child. He touched me, and immediately my skin was clear. Better than healed skin was a healed heart. All the emotional scars, and the self hate, and the depression, that I had lived with for decades were gone.

I stood up and with my healed limbs I threw that bell as far as I could. As I began to walk, I was taken aback by the silence – the joyful, peaceful silence – no bell, no clanging, not constantly hearing myself scream.

I went to the priest to fulfill the second part of the Messiah's request. I will never forget the look on his face, as the priest – the one who shunned me and shackled me to the tell-tale bell, realized who I was. We stood in silence, and as I turned around, I laughed. I laughed for the first time since I was a boy.

And then I lived for the moment. I made up for all of life that I was forced to miss – self centered living: doing, seeing and experiencing that satisfied me! As for the first part of his request – to keep my mouth shut - well I told everyone.

Funny it never occurred to me that I didn't see the Messiah again until Passover. I guess I was so busy living my life the way I wanted that I completely lost track of the one who gave me new life. I came to the Holy City Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover – something I was never before allowed to do. It was there that I saw the familiar face of the Messiah branded as a criminal, hanging on the Cross.

At the Cross was one of his disciples named John. I asked him what happened. John said that after Jesus healed me, and I told everyone what he asked me to keep to myself, I made it impossible for him to enter a town, that he had become the one who had to avoid people.

The roles were reversed. So much of his flesh had been ripped from his body that he was the one who looked like a leper. He did not wear a bell, but rather a cross to declare his shame. He was the one who was screaming, not me. He was the one who people turned their eyes from. The roles had definitely reversed.

As I approached him, I was the one who regretted not having the authority to tell him to wash himself clean. I was the one who felt guilty for being healthy while he was dying. As I approached him, I felt the same burning in my heart, and the same healing of my skin that fateful day on the road.

Then everything started happening so fast. As I walked toward him on legs that were healed by him, soldiers were bickering over whether to break His. People were jeering while others were wailing. Priests were screaming something about invoking Elijah.

So I thought, "Live for the moment." I said, "Thank you." After I said those words, Jesus died, and the Roman soldier said, "Surely this man is the Son of God." I said to myself, "You're telling me."

And since that Friday, I don't live for me. I don't live for the moment. I live for Him.