

Immerse Day 45 :: April 2

Friday's reading takes a close look at leprosy - a common skin disease for the Hebrews during their exile in Egypt as well as during their years in the wilderness. Let me put my nursing cap on for a moment here to explain what we know about this disease today. The condition is contagious and caused by a bacteria that is spread via droplets from the nose and mouth. The ancients understood the contagious nature of leprosy, but not its mechanism. The disease develops slowly, can become chronic in nature, and results in inflammatory skin lesions and disfiguring deformities. Historically, individuals who were infected were considered outcasts in many cultures.

Back to Leviticus. In Biblical times, the plague of leprosy created a state of "unclean-ness" and was often considered a punishment for a particular sin. The judgement of it was referred to the priests. There seems to be a parallel here between the actual skin disease and a "leprosy of the soul". God's instructions include a diagnostic and treatment protocol for the priests - to clearly identify the infected areas; to take time to observe whether the lesions were "skin-deep" or pervasive; and to separate the infected individual from the community while doing so to prevent further contamination; and finally to restore "clean-ness" through sacrifice and healing. We might note here that God intended these instructions to refer to one's spiritual state too. "Clean" or "unclean"...that is the question.

While the reading of these passages might seem tedious and irrelevant to us today, I see some insights to be gleaned...

Don't be hasty in your judgement of others - do the homework, take the time;
When pronounced "unclean" there will be loss of privilege and connection - we must bear the cost of our sin
When pronounced "unclean" even one's garments are to be burned - sin stains all it touches;
And of course, we can celebrate the hope of being declared "clean" through a blood sacrifice of Christ.

The final section of today's reading takes a look at mildew - that was unexpected! But how appropriate! I think we all know how mildew can contaminate and spread and also affect our bodies in adverse ways. Like sin, mildew in "one's house" is destructive. And like sin, it can only be eradicated through the agency of a priest (in our day Christ) with a blood sacrifice.

Now on to Monday's reading on bodily discharges. Who ever said that Leviticus isn't "interesting"!