

THE ACTIONS OF JESUS: TOUCH

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" (Mark 1:41, NIV)

IT IS INTENDED INVARIABLY TO BE A COMPLIMENT. When a quiet player consistently produces good scores, we say something like this: "He lets his game do the talking." It's the golf version of "actions speak louder than words." Whether this expression is solid, living truth or a popular truism, its foothold in our system of cultural values is firm. We want to know that there's substance behind people's promises—and when there is, we laud their character.

What is interesting when we read the Bible, then, is that we so often focus on the *words*. It is, you know, the *words* of Jesus that are printed in red! In many contexts, you really have to pay attention to see references to his actions. We may only be scraping the surface, but for several studies let's pay that close attention, using Mark's Gospel as our text.

In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus was approached by a man with leprosy. Technically, this may have been the actual dreaded disease or something else adversely affecting his skin, but its presence had cut the man off from his family and friends. He was desperate for healing, and he came to this rabbi about whom the stories were already circulating: he had the power to heal.

The operative word in the sentence you've just read may be *rabbi*, for Jesus was Jewish and quite familiar with the laws of the Torah. Among these was the prohibition against touching those unclean with leprosy. To touch such a person required the inconvenience of extra cleansing and a quarantine period. A rabbi would be especially careful to avoid this kind of uncleanness.

But Jesus displayed his compassion, and he did so not by his words but by his action. He touched the man.

Think on this scene for a minute. The healing came not because of Jesus' touch but rather by his words. He could have said to the man, "OK, you stand over there and I'll stand over here and I'll speak the healing you need." After all, he healed the centurion's servant from a distance (Matthew 8).

Jesus knew the value of action, though. His touch was a purposeful act of caring. It may be the exact kind of gesture we need to make when we minister in his name.

Opening questions How do you assess the consistency between a person's words and their actions? What other aspects of character do you consider important?

READING Mark 5:21-43; Acts 3:1-10; 2 Corinthians 13:12

Touchy matters (Mark 5)
How does the role of touch enter the two accounts in this passage? What are the positive effects of human contact in ministry? What are its limitations?

Following Jesus' lead (Acts 3)
Where does touch enter into this account of Peter healing the beggar? Why is it important that Jesus' disciples employed not only his words but his methods?

Touch in our context (2 Corinthians 13)
How does the idea of greeting other believers with a holy kiss sit with you? If it makes you uncomfortable, what expression of Christian fellowship might you offer to reflect a deep personal connection in our time?

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