



# “WILLING AND ABLE”

**MATTHEW 8:1-3 ;  
MARK 1:43-45**

***A Sermon BY  
Rev. Dr. Gina M. Stewart***

**SEPTEMBER  
29**

**11AM**



**Date & Service**     September 29, 2024, 11 AM  
**Preacher:**           Rev. Dr. Gina M. Stewart  
**Sermon Title:**        “Willing and Able”  
**Scripture:**            Matthew 8:1-3 (NIV); Mark 1:43-45 (NIV)

**Matthew 8:1-3:** *When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. <sup>2</sup> A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”*

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.*

**Mark 1:43-45:** <sup>43</sup> *Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:* <sup>44</sup> *“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”* <sup>45</sup> *Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.*

## SERMON SUMMARY

During Alfred Street’s Mission Sunday, Rev. Dr. Gina M. Stewart reminds us that we serve a God who is both willing and able, with the power and authority to intercede on behalf of His children. She opens her sermon by asking a profound question: *What does it mean to live on the margins?* Or, as Howard Thurman phrased it in his book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, “What does it mean to live among the disinherited?” Rev. Dr. Stewart explains that living “*on the margins*” means being denied access to the opportunities that promote human flourishing. It is to be oppressed, forgotten, stripped of agency, and relegated to the shadows of society, looked over, locked out, and left out.

In Matthew 8:1-3, the leper in the text represents people living disinherited lives. In the ancient world, leprosy was an incurable disease that left its sufferers socially, economically, and spiritually destitute. Lepers were seen as ritually unclean and unable to participate in community life. They were forced to announce their illness by shouting “unclean” whenever they encountered the presence of others. In essence, leprosy was a life sentence of isolation and deprivation.

To help us grasp how severe the lepers’ plight was, Rev. Dr. Stewart compares the leper in the text to marginalized groups today. Stating how modern-day lepers would be those who are impoverished, people of color, refugees, immigrants, and the differently abled. They are people who society has ostracized and systematically silenced.

However, the leper in this passage does something surprising. He makes the audacious decision to break the law and approach Jesus. Rev. Dr. Stewart explains that certain circumstances push us to the edge, compelling us to go beyond societal boundaries. For this leper, being cast out and considered ritualistically unclean drove him to seek the one person he knew could change his situation – Jesus.

In Matt 8:2, the leper says to Jesus, “...if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Rev. Dr. Stewart highlights how this statement was the leper’s way of acknowledging Jesus’ power and authority to transform lives. It is an acknowledgement that Jesus has the ability to do what no one else could: make him clean.

In Matt 8:3, Jesus responds, “I am willing.” Rev. Dr. Stewart emphasizes that this response is not only for the leper but is also good news for us today. It reminds us that we serve a God who is not only willing; we serve a God who is also able! God is willing AND able to restore us, reintegrate us into society, and grants us the acceptance we seek. Most importantly, God has the temperament and capacity to heal us from the inside out, giving us new life and the opportunity to rejoice in a fresh beginning.

As she concludes her sermon, in Mark 1:43-45, after Jesus has done for him what no one else could, the leper feels compelled to share his story, even though Jesus instructed him to remain silent. Rev. Dr. Stewart highlights that some experiences with Jesus are so transformative that we simply cannot keep them to ourselves. Let us praise God for being both willing AND able to do the extraordinary when others cannot.

## KEY POINTS

1. In *Jesus and The Disinherited*, Howard Thurman asks the question, “What does it mean to live among the disinherited? To live with one’s back against the wall?” (See “**Additional Resources**”)
2. The leper in Matthew 8:1-3 represents someone living a disinherited life.
3. In the ancient world, being diagnosed with leprosy meant being permanently labeled “unclean” and excluded from society.
4. Despite being cut off from society, this leper was bold enough to break the law and approach Jesus about his predicament.
5. In verse 2, the leper says to Jesus, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”
6. The leper’s plea is not just for physical healing but for the removal of stigma, restoration of dignity, and a return from the margins to belonging to community.
7. The lepers’ declaration recognizes Jesus’ power and authority to transform lives and situations.
8. Jesus’ response, “I am willing” shows not only His ability but also His willingness to act where others cannot or choose not to.
9. We serve an ambidextrous God – one who is both willing AND able.

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. If you could host a dinner party with three people from the Bible that stood up for the marginalized, who would you invite and what would you serve?
2. If you could choose one super power to help advocate for those in need, what would it be and how would you use it?

## INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. The leper in today's text boldly approached Jesus and made his request. Identify other Biblical examples of people who boldly approached Jesus. What was Jesus' response in the examples you found? What did you learn about your access to Jesus from these passages?
2. Rev. Dr. Stewart reminds us that Jesus has the temperament and power to help us. What Bible passages showcase God's power?

## LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. In Mark 1:43-45, after Jesus heals the leper and instructs him to keep quiet about the healing, the leper goes and tells everyone. Have you ever been asked to keep something to yourself, but it was so exciting or good that you couldn't help but share it? What was it, and why did you feel the need to tell others?
2. Rev. Dr. Stewart reminds us of key New Testament figures like Blind Bartimaeus ([Mark 10:46-52](#)), the woman with the issue of blood ([Mark 5:25-34](#)), and this leper, who all demonstrated remarkable boldness in seeking healing. Reflect on your own life. What miracles or transformative experiences have you encountered as a result of your willingness to step out on faith and take bold action?

3. Rev. Dr. Stewart stated that we are image bearers of God. What specific attributes must we possess in our own lives to make a transformative difference in the lives of others the way Jesus did in the life of the leper?
4. In today's sermon we learn about the challenges and limitations lepers faced (**See "Additional Resources"**). When considering some of our current laws and practices that limit marginalized groups, what Biblical principles and/or practical actions can you engage in to challenge and combat these issues?
5. There are marginalized people who struggle to have faith due to their past experiences. How might we share with them that God is willing and able to do "exceedingly and abundantly more than we can think or imagine" ([Ephesians 3:20](#)).
6. Rev. Dr. Stewart referenced Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*, describing the modern-day marginalized and disinherited in our society as those who are impoverished, people of color, refugees, immigrants, and differently abled persons, among others. How do you think we, as individuals or in the community, can actively work to eliminate these margins and create a more inclusive environment for all?
7. The leper expressed confidence in Jesus' ability to heal him saying, "I know you can do it." Yet, he added, "if you are willing." Jesus' responded with, "Yes, I am willing!" Jesus demonstrated both the power and temperament to fulfill the leper's request. Likewise, we have the POWER to evoke change within our respective spheres of influence. How are you using your own power and privilege in support of the *least of these*?

## **“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS**

1. In what ways do our personal biases about marginalized communities affect our mission efforts? Considering our congregation’s commitment to the local community in service initiatives like *Feed the 5000*, how might we further address the systemic causes of marginalization?
2. Rev. Dr. Stewart describes situations that push us to the edge of our humanity, compelling us to disregard societal rules or laws. In light of the January 6th insurrection, how do we reconcile the actions of those who felt justified in breaking the law for their beliefs with our Christian call to uphold justice and peace? What does this mean for our understanding of moral authority and the boundaries of civil disobedience?

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

1. Reflecting on the leper’s boldness in approaching Jesus, despite being outcast and considered unclean, can you think of a time in your life when you had to push beyond societal boundaries or expectations to seek help or make a change? How did it impact you?
2. Rev. Dr. Stewart speaks about living on the margins and being excluded from the opportunities for human flourishing. In what ways have you experienced marginalization or exclusion due to your identity? How does the knowledge that God is both willing AND able to restore and accept you offer you hope in your transformational journey?

3. The leper broke societal rules to seek healing from Jesus. In our relationships, how can we push past comfort zones or challenges to bring our deepest needs before God, trusting in God's ability to transform our relationships?
4. In marriage, there may be times when you feel like your relationship is pushed to the margins or is under strain. How can both partners trust in God's ability and willingness to bring healing, reconciliation, and new life to the marriage?
5. Living on the margins can mean being overlooked or stripped of agency. As a parent or guardian, have you ever felt like you were living on the margins? How do you rely on God's willingness and ability to restore peace and strength in your family?

### ***INDIVIDUAL OR VILLAGE STUDY***

#### **SPIRIT WORK/ACTIVITY**

Pray a special prayer this week for sectors of society that are typically marginalized (i.e. homeless, those who are/were incarcerated, various minority groups, etc.). Ask the Lord to replenish them spiritually, physically and emotionally as well as to grant them courage in their walk, despite how society treats them.

For additional consideration, connect with the ASBC prison ministry to find out how you can serve/make a difference. You can also make a commitment to serve the homeless in the winter months with your Discipleship Group.



## OR

### Developing the Right Temperament to Serve

This seven-day devotional is designed to engage us in focused reflection about our varied temperaments and how they impact the way we “show up” when serving others.

- **Day 1: Scripture:** *Proverbs 16:32* - “Better a patient person than a warrior, those with self-control than those who take a city.”  
**Prompt:** Reflect on a recent situation where your temperament influenced your response to someone in need. How could patience have changed the outcome?
- **Day 2: Scripture:** *Ephesians 4:2* - “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”  
**Prompt:** Think about how humility and gentleness impact your relationships. How can embodying these qualities help you connect with marginalized individuals?
- **Day 3: Scripture:** *Colossians 3:12* - “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”  
**Prompt:** Write about a time when your temperament aligned with or contradicted these qualities. What did you learn about yourself and your interactions with others?
- **Day 4: Scripture:** *James 1:19* - “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”  
**Prompt:** Reflect on how your listening skills influence your ability to empathize with marginalized individuals. How can becoming a better listener improve your responses to their needs?
- **Day 5: Scripture:** *Galatians 5:22-23* - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

**Prompt:** Identify which of the fruit of the Spirit you feel you embody well and with which you struggle. How do these strengths and weaknesses impact your approach to serving others?

- **Day 6: Scripture:** *Romans 15:7* - “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”  
**Prompt:** Consider how acceptance is influenced by your temperament. What steps can you take to ensure that you are genuinely accepting of those who are marginalized?
- **Day 7: Scripture:** *Proverbs 14:29* - “Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.”  
**Prompt:** Reflect on your temperament in challenging situations involving

marginalized people. How can cultivating patience enhance your ability to show compassion and understanding?

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### Book

- [\*Jesus and the Disinherited\*](#) by Howard Thurman

### Videos

- The Bible Project: [An Overview of the Gospel of Matthew](#)
- The Bible Project: [An Overview of the Gospel of Mark](#)
- The Bible Project: [An Overview of the Laws of Lepers](#)

### Missions:

- [Learn More About Lott Carey](#)
- [Learn More About \*Feed the 5000\*](#)