

## The Untouchables

### Opening

- Good morning and thank you for joining me in today's sermon. I want to thank Pastor Renata for allowing me the opportunity to share my thoughts and biblical principles of equity. After the service, we will host a follow-up discussion via Zoom. I hope many of you will join me and David Blakemore who will moderate our conversations.

### Prayer

- So, let me begin with prayer.
- Father God, thank you for this opportunity to share what I have learned from you. I ask for clarity in those listening to this sermon, for the strength in delivering this message, and for those who can embrace these sensitive topics with an open mind. But, most importantly I ask for "warmth" to be felt by the CLC family as I deliver these words given to me by you the Redeemer. Amen.

### Second Opening Remarks/Beginning of Sermon

- I want YOU...to accompany me...on a *journey*. As we walk together, we will meet the **beast** of racial inequities, economic disparities, and environmental and health injustices.
- We will also meet **powerful forces**, like *Compassion*, *Human Touch*, and *the greatest—"Love"*-- in the face of the world's most terrifying monstrosities. Now let's begin our Odyssey.
- We will be introduced to Matthew 8:3-- a transformative verse that leaves the listener wondering, "Who witnessed this act?"
- The verse reads: *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.*

- Initially, when I read this verse, I thought about a Superhero from Hollywood’s best Marvel movies and DC Comics—Superman, the Green Lantern, Batman, or even Wonder Woman. But no. Here we are confronted with Jesus who is a man, incarnate by God, who reaches out to a stranger and announces that he is willing and then shouts, “Be Clean!”
- What happens next? The man was cured of his illness. This is not just any illness. This is a condition that banishes you from society to either live alone, with others like yourself or to simply die. Leprosy was essentially a curse among the living. ***You are cursed as an Untouchable.***
- So, reading this short bible verse I immediately think--you’ve got to be a formidable force to perform this miracle. The act alone makes me know that Christ was a “life-giver” in the face of desolation.
- If we look at this verse closer--Jesus was so fearless and he literally touched mankind in their desperate and most vulnerable moments as he walked the earth. With this understanding--leprosy was not a deterrent for that kind of power. This verse reminds me that he laid hands on all—through love and human touch. His walk took him to worlds that some could not or would not go alone.
- Now, let us take a voyage into a world that some of you may never have experienced, and let’s see how God directs us in our thoughts and discussions in hearing this message entitled ***The Untouchables.***

Even in the 21st century, an entire population in India and Hindu regions of Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh is often considered contaminated from birth. They are called "Dalits,"(Da-lits). Dalit is from Sanskrit—or the term *dalita* meaning "broken/scattered.”

Dalits (Da-lits), also known as "Untouchables," are members of the lowest social group in the Hindu caste system. The word "Dalit" also means "oppressed.” These individuals are actually born below the caste system, which includes four primary castes.

Dalits (Da-lits) face discrimination and even violence from members of higher castes, or traditional social classes--particularly in terms of access to jobs, education, and marriage partners.

Although the United States does not practice a formal caste system, others that look like me have experienced...walking into stores to purchase an item and noticed that they are being surveilled...*Untouchable*.

Or

Walking into a gym—the women’s locker room fearful to undress and labeled “fat” and knowing that you were born Black—you think these spaces are not for you...and... then the stares from others confirm ...*Untouchable*.

Or

Making a reservation over the phone with a new home builder and they mistakenly think you are Caucasian—you arrive and suddenly you are treated differently. A series of perceptions flood your mind. The perception is you have no means to purchase a home (because you are of color or perceived at low economic status). Therefore, why are you in this space? ... *Untouchable*.

These examples are micro-aggressions pushed against equity for Black and brown people. But...wait... this monster does stop there. Its bloodthirsty teeth rip through communities suffering from poverty who are white and rural. It swallows all those struggling with economic instabilities. These attacks can occur to those who are Caucasian but are in a lower class or “caste” system. *Untouchables*.

Or

How about an “oldie but goodie”—complements of the Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 2, September 17, 1787-- that African Americans as individuals are considered three-fifths of a person or that they are three-fifths of citizens—they are *Untouchable*.

One could argue that those American citizens who invaded the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup>, through an insurrection, with their anger, rage, and hate—wanting to reclaim legitimacy--on what was fought in the Revolutionary war. Some would label them *Untouchables*.

Finally, we have a new divider...this monster...*Health Disparities* has been around for a long time but he has a new baby brother named Corona Virus, some know him as COVID-19. His nickname in some communities of color is “Rona” Those who have suffered from COVID-19—have shared with me that they experienced shame once they found out they were infected, they did not want anyone to know, for fear of judgment. *Untouchable*.

Or

How about those in our communities, where the vaccinated are fighting the unvaccinated or vice versa—These people believe each other as *Untouchable*.

These paradigms are cases of social and environmental “injustices.” For many branded untouchable--the ideas of safe neighborhoods, equitable transit, luxury housing developments, a variety of stores, or clean air, are not prevalent. Because you are poor—whether white, Black, or brown—these entitlements would not exist. People living in economically challenged parts of a city or county—or areas of persistent poverty would never see these normalities that some of us take for granted. These options are non-existent in their worlds.

The word “equity” does not exist, and it is suffocated by words such as *generational poverty, pre-existent conditions, separate but equal, closed borders*.

The illustrations both historical and current, highlighted are a few glimpses into our society’s way of separating people through race relations or economic stratification levels.

Yet, if we pause for a moment and go back to Christ-- through his teachings, he has demonstrated that we as his children have the right to God’s equal share of love and acceptance no matter what walk of life you come from.

His dealings with man’s shortcomings were through his death on the cross and his resurrection was to give life to all. I believe if Christ were walking the earth in the 21st Century, he might pronounce that we need to understand the suffering of man (as if it were our own suffering). I believe Christ would suggest stopping in making ourselves untouchable with gated communities, redlining real estate to keep others out, segregating ourselves on Sunday morning, etc. We who are privileged—whether white, Black or other--use the money to become *unattainable*

—keeping the rest of the world out—or at least only cracking the door just a little to let some in.

I believe God wants us to have empathy for a human plight and rescuing, touching, or saving becomes the primary focus. *“Equity” becomes a natural barrier to fight the virus of racism.*

So, let’s examine, racial equity—it is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes. We accomplish economic equity is when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial or economic equity when those most impacted by structural inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

- What does mean? Let’s examine Martin Luther King’s Poor People Campaign.

### King’s Poor People Campaign

In 1968, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and many others called for a “revolution of values” in America. They sought to build a broad, fusion movement that could unite poor and impacted communities across the country. The Poor People's March on Washington (or famously known as *The March on Washington Mall*) was organized by Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and carried out under the leadership of Ralph Abernathy in the wake of King's assassination in April 1968.

By 1968, the War on Poverty seemed like a failure, neglected by a Johnson administration (and Congress) that wanted to focus on the Vietnam War and increasingly saw anti-poverty programs as primarily helping African Americans. The Poor People's Campaign sought to address poverty through income and housing for citizens falling through America’s economic cracks.

King and others believed that people’s basic needs to survive and thrive in this country were a *human right*. The campaign demanded economic and basic rights for poor Americans of diverse backgrounds. After presenting an organized set of demands to Congress and executive agencies, participants set up a 3,000-person

protest camp on the Washington Mall, where they stayed for six weeks in the spring of 1968.

The Poor People's Campaign was part of the second phase of the Civil Rights Movement. The first part of the movement was to register voters across the South for African Americans to gain political power.

Today, the national call for moral revival is real. This social and economic resurgence began in 2018 when poor people and other communities in 40 states committed themselves to a season of direct action to launch the Campaign.

In June 2019, the campaign convened over 1,000 community leaders in Washington, D.C. for the Poor People's Moral Action Congress, which included the largest presidential candidates' forum of the pre-debate season, the release of our Poor People's Moral Budget, and a hearing before the House Budget Committee on the issues facing the 140 million poor and low-income people in the nation.

In the summer and fall of 2020, the expansion of this movement demonstrated the power of poor people to be agents of change in not just one election, but at the very heart of this democracy. In this time of significant danger and real possibility, a moral fusion movement is necessary to revive and advance our most precious Constitutional and moral values.

### So What Do We Do as CLC Members?

To make an impact, we need to link up with other moral leaders and people of conscience to break through the silos of our work and the divisions that have been wrought in our communities. Christ Lutheran has done some of the work. This series of conversations is a continuation of involving our core community in the much-needed discussions of race, and equity-- intersecting those conversations with biblical principles.

To further the work, we as a community can formally join WIN—the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), founded in 1996. This is a broad-based, multi-racial, multi-faith advancing social justice, equitable housing while building economic vitality for Washington DC communities left behind.

As CLC continues to forge ahead with social justice programs that affect the lives of those living in the DMV area supplementary work needs to be done by our young adults and seasoned parishioners—to preserve e equal rights through voting.

There is an assault on our democracy! We need to help protect voter's rights, now. Christ Lutheran actively assisting with preserving voter's rights should be one of our primary steps.

Let me leave you with these thoughts...

- We as a church rise not as left or right, Democrat or Republican, but as a moral fusion movement to build power, build moral activism, build voter participation, and we won't be silent anymore!
- Moving forward, let us rise to change the moral narrative and demand that the interlocking injustices of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy/militarism.
- Let us rise to challenge the lie of scarcity amid abundance.
- Let us rise to lift the voices and faces of poor and low-income Americans and their moral allies with a new vision of love, justice, and truth for America that says poverty can be abolished and change can come.

Let us...Christ Lutheran Church...rise and reach and out to the *Untouchables* by being *Touchable*. Thank you and God bless!

