

Confessions of a recovering germaphobe

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CUREkids Coordinator Avaneil takes a photo with the current happiest, cutest kid in the ward, Silaji, before he goes home!

Cleanliness ≠ Godliness

I think sometimes we imagine Jesus in His spotless white robes, hovering like two inches above the dirt with a force field around Him. Cleanliness is next to godliness, after all, so Jesus must have been the cleanest person who ever lived, right?

Probably not.

“A man with leprosy came and knelt before [Jesus] and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.”

I’ve always been a bit of a germaphobe. For me, it’s mind over matter. It’s a conscious decision that I was first made aware of crouched next to a young immigrant mother and her baby who were begging in a filthy New York City subway stop. It was a choice: I can remain crouching, hovering an inch above the dirt, or I can embrace the fact that in this life the only way to show love to people who sit in the dirt is to sit with them.

I heard a sermon once about Matthew 8. The pastor emphasized the fact that Jesus touched the leper. He touched him. Nobody touches a leper. It was not only physically unhealthy but also made you spiritually unclean. This may have been the first time this man was touched in many, many, many years. Can you imagine how he must have felt? It’s hard enough for me being far away from my family and friends and not having anyone I can hug. I can’t imagine what it would be like to not have any human contact for—heaven knows—how many years.

Matthew 8 is a display of Christ’s humility and love for humanity on a microscale. It’s an object lesson of who

God's Son is in everything. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He, who was in very nature God, made Himself nothing; being made in human likeness and humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. The King of Majesty became a human child to take our sins, our uncleanness, upon Himself.

I think it's especially important to show these kids that they are loved in a tangible way—through love and respect, by not shying away from their pain. Many disabled kids here are often seen as “spiritually dirty,” unclean, and unholy by people in their community. They are seen as cursed: worthless. Something you or your parents did brought this curse of disability on you. Many of the kids are teased or bullied by their friends. It's hard enough to have a disability; how much harder it must be to have a disability where there is no support.

I can see certain parallels to Jesus' compassion for the sick and disabled in how CURE staff interacts with patients here. Often the kids and their parents have been turned away from other hospitals, or the treatment has been nominal or ineffective. They come here and we can tell them, no, your child is not cursed. There is hope. Your child can be healed. We can treat them with dignity, something that is sometimes sorely lacking in public hospitals.

I am still a recovering germaphobe. I still shy away from picking up babies in the ward because I know they don't wear diapers. It's shameful to say, but I'm still becoming comfortable with not being clean and still learning that physical cleanliness is nothing at all like godliness. I'm still learning how to be like Jesus, how to touch the untouchable, because showing love is more important than being clean.