



Mercy MOMENTS

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*opening the
door to a world
where the
healing,
liberating and
life-giving
mercy of
God is
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Affirming Personhood



My family and I once had the privilege of spending Christmas with a leper community in a city south of Kolkata. For my family it was the first engagement with sufferers of leprosy. Prior to taking my wife and two sons into the leper colony, I prepared them as best I could for some of the confronting and difficult sights they might encounter. At one point I said to them that in my opinion you've never shaken anyone's hand until you've shaken the hand of someone with leprosy.

Upon arrival at the colony, I took the family into the dispensary where some of the worst cases are initially treated before they find their way in the community. In the course of being introduced to these patients, most of whom had stark wounds and amputations, my wife and sons not only reached out to shake hands, but they embraced many of the patients and engaged with them in a very natural way. Of course, I was enormously proud of them!

Later on we discussed the full significance of what had happened in that encounter. When we shake hands in our culture it's most often a gesture between equals. However, as I explained to my sons, the moment we reach out and touch someone who has leprosy, it may be the first time in that person's life that they've been afforded the dignity of being considered a human being worthy of touch. In their world they are considered outcasts and unable to take any place in society. They would not normally encounter human touch on a regular basis outside their family. To have someone reach out and embrace them can be a profound acknowledgement of their humanity.

Even though we may never encounter a person with leprosy or any other such extreme marginalisation, as Christians we are all called to affirm and champion human dignity and potential and include the excluded.'

Source: Wayne Tinsey: *Touch Stones*, 2014

REFLECTION

- > When do we have the opportunity to reach out to another?
- > Do we celebrate hands of mercy and compassion in our organisations.