

Luke 17:11-19

11On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

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We do not have "Lepers" today. Leprosy is/was a mildly contagious disease- which today is called Hansen's disease and can be readily treated with sulfa drugs.

The people in Palestine were afraid of lepers because they could infect healthy people with their disease, and they despised the lepers as people who must have committed terrible secret sins.

Since leprosy shows in the skin, lepers could not hide their illness from the community, so they were shunned and forced to live apart.

Though leprosy is not now fatal, it can left untreated affect the voice and vision, as well as the skin, nose, toes, and fingers, and the leper's physical condition continues to deteriorate during his or her lifetime. Lepers were un clean and therefore unable to participate in any of the aspects of community including worship.

Because lepers could not participate in worship, most people believed that the disease was a punishment for earlier sins - not being able to worship God was the worst punishment people could imagine - so people thought the lepers must have done something horrible to be punished so severely for their whole lifetimes.

Now the name used for the people who suffered from the diseases of leperacy was "Leper". Why do we call people with a disease that disease. You say- no we don't do that, we don't call a patient with cancer a cancer, but yes we do- She's diabetic, he's an alcoholic. There is, it seems to me, a distinction in our language between diseases we think, just happen to people, You have shingles, not you are shingled, and diseases which we blame the victim for. You eat too much sugar, diabetic, drink to much- alcoholic. We either differentiate the person from the disease or we define the person by their disease, depending on whether we think they are responsible for their condition or not. This may not be 100% accurate, but it is I think telling of how we treat certain diseases.

Anyway- back to the story for today- Today Jesus encounters 10 Lepers. The people were living on the outskirts of society. The ten call out to Jesus- have mercy on us Master. The only other folk in the Bible who call Jesus master are the disciples. And Jesus sends them to the priests; which is exactly what he needed to do- since only a declaration from the priests could return the status of "Clean" to them, so that they could return to life. Prior to this, they are just dead men walking. However, the scripture make a point of saying, ON their way, before they even reach the priests, they are made clean. The scripture makes a point of telling us that it is because of their interaction with Jesus that they are made clean, and not just because the priests will see and say it is so. Now one thing that is of special interest in this timeline is that, they lepers are on their way when they are made clean. Note the, ***on their way***. They were not healed, or made clean, and then they went to show themselves to the priests. But ***on their way*** they are made clean. They had to set off first to go to the priests they had to step out in faith. Then, then they were made clean. They had to take a first step. How often do we wait around for something to happen before we take action? How often are we waiting on God before we step up to the plate? How many times have you heard someone say, "Lord, Just give me a sign?" Maybe we have to start? Maybe we have to take the first steps, no matter how small or slow or afraid we are of falling down? Maybe we have to begin the journey in order to be in the place where we can see the sign?

Now all ten of the Lepers have started on the journey to the priests, to be declared clean. Just as Jesus has told them to do. But one comes back, once he sees his disease has vanished, one comes back to praise God and thank Jesus. And that one is of course a Samaritan.

A Samaritan, the most hated people, enemies of the Jews. By the first century, the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans was entrenched and old. The two groups disagreed about everything that mattered to them: how to honor God, how to interpret the scriptures, where to worship. They avoided social contact whenever possible. And guess what, they still do. The Samaritans of old are basically the residents of the west bank in Israel, today. Mind you in Jesus' day they were not, I repeat not Muslims- because there were no Muslims, Mohamed had not been born yet. But, the conflict in the middle east has been going on for millennia and did not come about with the rise of Islam, that merely took hold and flourished in an already entrenched conflict.

Anyway- the one who comes back to say thank you- is the one, the audience of this story would least expect to see as the good guy. The Gospel again, as it always does, turns our expectations upside down. The doubly accursed Samaritan Leper, is the one who praises God and thanks Jesus! And Jesus' response to the man is to tell him his faith has made him well. wait a minute- didn't all 10 get healed? Well, all ten we are told were made clean. Which yes implies their disease was removed- so that they could be declared clean by the powers that be.

But Jesus means something more. Jesus means- Your act of faith, has made you *whole*, not just disease free, but whole in body, mind, and spirit! The Greek word

sesoken, can be translated as healed, made well, or even saved. However we translate it, one thing is clear: there is more at stake here than a mere physical healing.

Jesus says Your faith has made you whole. Not just have you been cured, but you have been restored to life. You have been given new life. You are a beloved child of God. You who were despised and shunned for your nationality and disease, are now part of the children of God, the community of faith, the holy and whole ones! As Julian of Norwich says- "All will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well"- because your faith has made you well.

So ten are restored bodily to health, and one through an attitude of gratitude is restored to life. Gratitude is the noblest emotion. Gratitude draws us out of ourselves into something larger, bigger, and grander than we could imagine and joins us to the font of blessing itself. Gratitude is also the most powerful emotion, as it frees us from fear, releases us from anxiety, and emboldens us to do more and dare more than we'd ever imagined. Even to return to a Jewish rabbi to pay homage when you are a Samaritan because you've realized that you are more than a Samaritan, or a leper, or even a healed leper; you are a child of God, whole and accepted and beautiful just as you are.

And that's what the nine missed. It's not that they did anything wrong; They did exactly what was asked of and required of them. But they did not have the attitude which enabled them to express thanksgiving and with that- live into the hope in the future as whole, beloved, and blessed. May we learn from this outcast and disenfranchised foreigner, may we learn to have an attitude which enables us to accept and indeed experience our blessings fully that we may be made whole. Amen