

Pastor' Message – 10/9/2022
Luke 17:11-19

This passage from Luke 17, the story of Jesus' healing of the ten men with leprosy, seems, on the face of it, pretty easy to understand. It's obviously about gratitude and ingratitude. Right?

In the time and place and culture in which Jesus lived, lepers were not just perceived as a physical threat. They were also seen as a ritual and spiritual threat. The men in this story were more than just potentially infectious; they were ritually unclean. They were *cast out* (the same term as was used for how demons were treated) because their disease was thought to be not just physically but also spiritually deadly and contagious.

In addition, they were cast out from *everywhere and every social activity*. This group apparently included nine Judeans and one Samaritan. They were all equally unclean. The difference in their religious practice was irrelevant now. Somehow, these ten had been grafted into a set-apart community by this physical and spiritual contagion, and now they would have to make the best of it together as a community of outcasts.

There was only one way back in for them. If a priest declared them clean and healed after an appropriate examination, they could rejoin their own societies.

So, they hear about Jesus and call out to him. He hears them and tells them to go show themselves to the priests responsible for making the declaration. And they went on their way to do just that, discovering as they did that they had been *made clean*.

One of them, only one, came back to thank Jesus that he had been *cured*. Jesus told him his faith had saved him.

The temptation to moralism with this story of the "ungrateful lepers" is very strong. "You ought to be more thankful for what you have and for what God has done for you!" or "Don't be ungrateful like so many people, even religious people, are!"

Don't we have room for improvement in expressing thanks and praise to God? No question about it. We all do. We all can do better.

But today's story isn't primarily about moralism. I don't know that it is only about gratitude. I think it's also about healing. And it's

about Jesus doing everything He can to bring the fullest possible healing to people who are in need for healing.

Every one of us here has experienced a need for healing. Every one of us has experienced disease and sickness, disappointments and failures. Every one of us here has experienced the consequences of sin. Every one of us here stands before Jesus in need of healing. Healing is more than just restoration of physical health, but about a complete mind/body/spirit experience which may or may not include being cured of physical or mental illness.

This story is about healing and restoration. And it's a demonstration to his first disciples, and all disciples, about how we're to be about healing always, healing in every possible dimension and seeing where God heals and creates good out of even situations we might see as hopeless or without possibility of redemption. It's about seeing how God introduces grace and blessing into every situation.

There is a wonderful, old story from Guideposts magazine, first published in 1978 and repeated several times since which tells of a plain, old shoemaker's awl that is on prominent display in the French Academy of Science.

What makes this awl so special? It was the awl that fell one day from the shoemaker's table and put out the eye of his nine-year-old son. Soon, as a result of that accident, the child became blind in both eyes and was forced to attend school for the blind. At this school, the child learned to read by handling large, carved, wooden blocks.

When the shoemaker's son grew up, he thought of a new way for the blind to read. It involved punching dots on paper, and Louis Braille devised this new method by using the same awl that had blinded him to create a whole new reading system for the blind.

There will be a falling awl in each one of our lives. The choice is ours how it will affect us. In story author's words, "When it strikes, some of us ask, 'Why did God allow this to happen?' Others ask, 'How will God use it?'"

As Christians, we are called to do what is within our own ability, with God helping. The story of the ten men with leprosy today also raised the question of not just what we can do, but also of why we do what we do. Why do we help? If we do it because we want or

expect someone to thank us for our efforts, I think we're starting off on the wrong foot. I believe that it is part of our own salvation journey for us to give out of our abundance. The idea of doing good is not so that we receive thanks or even recognition, but to put ourselves in the context of living out our faith and giving glory to God. It is about seeing the need and acting to meet the need.

There's a song, and it's been around a while now, but a song popularized by Steve Green called "People Need the Lord" which, I believe, puts things in perspective.

*Every day they pass me by, I can see it in their eyes
Empty people filled with care, headed who knows where
On they go through private pain, living fear to fear
Laughter hides their silent cries, only Jesus hears*

*People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door
People need the Lord, people need the Lord
When will we realize people need the Lord?*

*We are called to take His light to a world where wrong seems right
What would be too great a cost for sharing life with one who's lost?*

*Through His love our hearts can feel all the grief they bear
They must hear the words of life only we can share*

*People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door*

*People need the Lord, people need the Lord
When will we realize that we must give our lives?
For people need the Lord; people need the Lord.*

The reality of our salvation is that, having received forgiveness and called into healing and restoration by Jesus, we are called to share the blessing of healing. It is in the offering of help, compassion, inclusion, support, and acceptance that we begin to understand

the connections between our lives and the rest of humanity. Our response to faith calls us to give, to respond, and to open up – not to expect gratitude, other than the gratitude we feel for the privilege of serving. It is remembering from whence our healing comes.

There is another old story about a magician who had great powers. He could heal the sick, make cripples walk, bring love to the lonely, find lost items, and tell the future with extraordinary accuracy. People came to him from miles around, and eventually, he took on an apprentice. To this apprentice he revealed all his secrets -- to go to a certain place in the woods to pray; the proper words of the magic spells, the ingredients for the cures, and how to look into a calm pond and see the future. At last, he died, but his apprentice went on to use what he had learned.

But as time passed, he had a hard time remembering the magic words, and he had to improvise. He couldn't always find the right ingredients for the charms and cures and had to make substitutions. Still, the magic seemed to work well for him, and he also took on an apprentice. This apprentice had no sooner inherited his teacher's practice than he lost the entire book of magic words. Then there was a famine, and most of the ingredients he needed to make the cures were unavailable.

So, he went to the place in the woods, and he prayed as he had never prayed before. Amazingly, the love potions seemed to work even better, and people were still healed when he took care of them. At last, he went back to that quiet place in the woods and asked God, "Lord, how is it that the miracles still happen? I have lost all the words, all the materials I needed." And God said, "What you have not lost is the most important thing: you remembered the Source, and to come back to it in whatever you set out to do."

Remembering the Source of our healing draws us to God and then sends us out to others. Finding healing ourselves leads us to heal others. Recognizing blessing causes us to bless others.