

Proper 23C

“Your faith has made you well”

Luke 17: 11-19 **The Ten Lepers**

On the surface, today’s gospel from Luke seems like a straightforward account of a healing miracle. But just beneath the surface lie some intriguing features, worth contemplating.

What did the ten lepers want from Jesus?

What did the ten lepers get from Jesus?

What did the thankful man get from Jesus?

First we need to deal with a few technical matters.

If you need to take a nap, you now have a few minutes to do so.

What is a leper?

In the Bible leprosy refers to a variety

of serious skin diseases,

including Hansens disease

or leprosy as we understand it today.

Leper at that time was a derogatory term,
noting a physical flaw,

as well as a moral or character defect.

The second technical point is clean and unclean.

This was a means of sorting things and people,
rooted in the Law of Moses.

The thing or person which was unclean

was separated until it was made clean

– by washing, by the passage of time,
or by natural resolution

of the thing that made it unclean.

It was not necessarily an indication of sin.

But it was a condition that caused the person or thing

to be separated from the community for a time.

Often this was very practical

– a person with a contagious disease

that manifested with a serious skin condition

was separated until the skin condition had resolved.

Another example is the 40 days after childbirth in which a mother was considered unclean, and restricted to her days of confinement.

This allowed the mother to recover from the stresses of childbirth, including the risk of infection, very common before modern times; as well as protecting the newborn baby, who was not separated from the mother, until its immune system was mature – which we now know occurs at around 40 days, and is why now we vaccinate babies at 6-8 weeks of age.

The third technical matter

is that the thankful man was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were an ethnic religious group that considered themselves to be of the people of Abraham, but were NOT recognized by the Jewish people

as part of the community of God.

They had their own center of worship

apart from the temple in Jerusalem.

Relationships were bad between Jews and Samaritans.

Jews going to Jerusalem for festivals

would take a longer and more difficult road

to avoid Samaritan country;

and Samaritans knowing that Jews were taking gifts of value

to the Temple in Jerusalem,

would sometimes rob the pilgrims.

The Gospel according to Luke

mentions the Samaritans

more than any other gospel account,

and is the only account

to mention them in a positive light.

If you dozed off, now is the time to wake up!

What did the ten lepers want from Jesus?

Being unclean, they kept their distance

and they said, "Jesus, Master, have MERCY on us."

What was behind that?

What did they really want?

Forgiveness of sin?

Physical healing?

Attention? Simple human connection?

To hear some of Jesus' wise words?

What did they get from Jesus?

He did not lay a healing hand on them.

He did not say a healing word.

He did not interrogate them about their morality.

He did not speak with them

to see if their serious skin condition

was a result of a sinful lifestyle.

And he did not heal them.

That's right.

Luke the physician can be trusted here to give an accurate account.

Jesus did not heal them.

He told them to go show themselves to the priest.

You see,

it was the priest who diagnosed unclean or clean when it came serious skin conditions.

It was a priest

who would declare that the person was now clean and could be restored to the community.

Luke says: As they went **THEY WERE CLEANSED**

They experienced what was necessary

to become full members of the community again.

What of the thankful man?

What was different about him?

As he went on his way, he saw that he was **HEALED**.

Luke's word here is a different word

than that used for a physical recovery:

it indicates a supernatural component as well.

Not only was he clean,

as the others noticed their skin disease resolve,

but he was aware

of a deeper transformation

that had taken place.

He was ecstatic: praising God in a loud voice

And he turned back,

fell on his face in front of Jesus,

and thanked him.

Who else WAS he to go to?

He was, after all, a Samaritan.

He could not go to the priest to be diagnosed “clean”

He returned to the One who had healed him.

And Jesus notes that he is the only thankful one, and a Samaritan at that, and –

this is the coolest part –

speaks to him:

“Get up, go on your way.

YOUR FAITH. HAS MADE YOU. WELL.

He does not say your faith has cleansed you.

He does not say your faith has healed you.

He says “YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL.”

This word

WELL

means rescued and restored;

it is the root of the word “salvation.”

He is not only made clean

and restored to his human community;

he is not only healed at a deeper level than just his skin;

he is in fact restored to a right relationship with God

– he is made whole;

he can now live in the fullness of the joy

of one who has known Jesus.

Some of us here

have experienced profoundly

what it is to be to be

cleansed

healed

and made whole.

What of the other nine?

We know they saw that they were made clean.

Were they aware that that they had also been healed
deeper than their skin?

Certainly they did NOT return to Jesus to thank him.

Only the Samaritan was made whole
and restored to a right relationship with God.

Brothers and sisters:

we have all called out to Jesus for mercy.

Those of us who have believed in Jesus

have been made clean in the waters of baptism.

We have died with Jesus and been raised with Jesus.

We are cleansed.

Some of us have seen deeper

and noted that we have been healed

– that our lives have been transformed
by the intervention of Jesus.

The invitation for us today
is to fall at Jesus' feet
with faith expressed in thanks and praise
and allow Jesus to make us **well**,
and **whole**.

As we come to **His** Table today,
may we offer him our highest praise,
and as we take his body and blood,
may we hear his voice say to us,
"Your faith. has made you. well." "Get up and go on your way."