

The Tenth Leper

This story about Jesus is familiar to most of us. We know the 10 lepers asked Jesus to heal them. We know he told them to go and show themselves to the priest and they went. While they were on the way they were healed. 9 of them we imagine went on to show themselves to the priest but one turned back to Jesus and gave heartfelt thanks.

On the surface, the moral that can be drawn from the story is the idea of being grateful when God does what we ask of him. We assume that the other 9 were not as grateful as the one, who by the way was a Samaritan. As I did with the children's message; we could stop right there and let the story teach its lesson of gratitude, but there is more.

First of all, let's look again at the situation with regard to the setting and time. In first century Israel there were two types of people; those who were Jews and those who were foreigners. The Samaritan was considered a foreigner and worse he was considered an enemy because centuries before the kingdom of Israel had suffered civil war and split into two kingdoms. There was the Kingdom of Judea whose capital was Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of Israel whose capital was Samaria. So this Samaritan was an outcast both because of his illness and because of his ancestry. With regard to the illness; leprosy was a general term for any skin rash or irritation that could be contagious. Leprosy itself was a horrible disease that caused disfiguration and could lead to loss of limbs. A person declared leprous was required to live away from the community and was untouchable—unclean—an outcast both socially and ritually. The disease in this story had brought ancient enemies together in a group to seek healing from Jesus. When Jesus healed them, he didn't touch them or even say any sort of prayer or healing words. He simply told them to go and show themselves to the priest. This was part of the ritual for

being declared clean. If you had been declared unclean by a priest, you needed to be declared clean by a priest in order to be restored both to the church and the community.

All ten of them had enough faith in Jesus or at least in what Jesus said to start on their way to the priest and the story says while they were on the way they were healed. Now here's where it gets interesting, because if we assume the one was more grateful than the other nine we miss an important point. The other nine did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They went to the priest. We don't know what happened after that, but we could assume that the priest declared them clean and they were able to return to their lives both in their church and their community. But did the other 9 recognize that God himself in the form of Jesus Christ had actually healed them and declared them fit to return to the community? I don't believe they did and that's what makes what the Samaritan even more significant.

When the Samaritan realized that he had been healed, he returned to Jesus to thank him and as it says in the story, 17:15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

17:16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

17:17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

17:18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

17:19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

The Samaritan recognized Jesus for what he truly was—God. It says he prostrated himself. This was what Moses often did in the presence of God. If you look back in the scriptures, most people prostrated themselves before God. It was an act of humility and worship. Because the Samaritan came back and made it clear that he not only was grateful but truly and fully recognized that the healing came from God, Jesus then told him to go on his way. He no longer had to show himself to the priest because he had returned and shown himself to the one true priest, Jesus Christ.

So how can we apply this lesson to our church today? First of all we need to identify the outcasts in our community. Who are those that are on the edge of our acceptance? Are there people who have been shunned, ostracized, or made to feel unclean or unwelcome? These are the people who need to turn to God and ask for healing. They are not going to come to us. Remember the story, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and passed near where the lepers were.

Jesus was not forming a social club where members only received certain benefits. Jesus was forming a group of people who were willing to take their message of salvation and hope and offer it to anyone who would listen, even those who were on the edge of society and considered outcasts. We need to turn our attention inside out. We need to start praying now and with greater intensity for those who do not have Jesus Christ in their hearts. We need to be willing to even take that message to the edge of our community, to places where the unclean, unwelcome, outcasts are, so that they may have the chance to ask Jesus to heal them. When we do that, we will really be doing what Jesus did. Nine out ten times we may help someone return to the community, but they won't recognize God's intervention in their life. But one in ten will see that God has given them not only what they asked for, but a whole

new way of living now and into eternity. Wouldn't you like to be part of something like that? If so, I hope you will join me in a bible study on how to take God's message into our community. This Bible study will begin in November during Advent and will be held on Wednesdays at 2 pm and 7 pm. Starting on November 30, 2016.

Let us pray:

Thank you, Jesus, for hearing us

When we cried for mercy!

Thank you, Jesus, for feeding us

When our hands were unclean!

Thank you, Jesus, for welcoming us

When we were foreigners!

Thank you, Jesus, for healing us

When we were wounded!

And thank you, Jesus, for sending us

To do the same. Amen.