

SERMON – 12/10/25

Luke 17:11-19

"One of the lepers, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him – and He was a Samaritan." (Luke 17:15-16)

Our Bible story this morning is a relatively well-known one, and its basic message is there for all to see – 'Don't forget to say Thank you.' That in itself may be something we need to be reminded of, of course, but I think there may also be some other lessons for us to learn as we take time to ponder what was going on in the passage we read.

By way of background it is worth noting that even today about a quarter of a million people worldwide are diagnosed with leprosy every year. Although 95% of people are actually naturally immune to it and even those who do contract it can take up to 20 years to develop symptoms it still carries much of the stigma that went with it in ancient times. It may surprise you to know that there two whole chapters in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus that outline what the people of Israel were to do if someone developed a skin condition that might be leprosy and what to do if they were declared free of the disease. These days it is very easily treated with antibiotics but, without the benefits of modern medicine, lepers in ancient times faced desperate hardship.

They were imprisoned outside the walls of the community, forbidden to approach anyone and unable to do anything about the disease that would gradually work its way through their limbs. There was no way out for them unless the skin disease they had cleared up by itself. In such circumstances they could take themselves off to see a priest who would declare them fit to resume their place in society. But those who had leprosy without any doubt about it were utterly helpless.

It seems that the ten people in our story were not just crying out to Jesus thinking He was just a random passer-by who might spare them some food, because they address Him by name and they call Him 'Master'. Someone must have told them about this wandering preacher and miracle worker and someone must have

told them that He was coming their way, for they would not have known otherwise. But the decision to call out in the way that they did – 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' (v.13) - was entirely their own. They were standing at a distance from the road as the Law required them to do and it may have taken a little while before Jesus heard them or worked out where the shouting was coming from, but this would be their only chance and in their desperation they persevered until they succeeded in drawing the Lord's attention.

Firstly this morning let me highlight the fact that the ten lepers in this morning's reading were very obviously helpless in their need, but what we don't often grasp is that just as the lepers were in their *physical* circumstances, in the *spiritual* realm every human being is actually in that situation. You and I have each fallen short of what God requires of us and because of that we are isolated from God and unable to rescue ourselves from our human predicament. Like the lepers in our story we too are helpless in our need.

Maybe it's because the whole world is imprisoned in sin that people like us don't *feel* like lepers – perhaps you even think it's a bit old-fashioned even to use a word like 'sinner' in church these days, yet it is of the essence of proclaiming the Good News of Christ for preachers like me to point out that we have all fallen short, that we all need to be rescued and that Jesus is the Saviour we all need. Do you and I recognise just how serious a matter our sin is and just how great our need is for a Saviour? Perhaps if we were physically banished from society when we overstep the mark with no way of being restored, we would be a bit more open to the Gospel.

My friends, here is Good News if you are willing to hear it. The Lord Jesus, the Saviour of the world, is drawing near to us right now, just as He drew near to where the lepers in our reading were. Are we going to cry out to Him this morning like they did? 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!'

The second thing I would like to point out this morning is that the unfolding of the story is utterly unremarkable. In comparison with many of the healing accounts in the Gospels there is no

obvious miracle, no crowd of onlookers amazed by Jesus' actions, not even any physical contact – no laying on of hands. All Jesus did was to say to the lepers: 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' (v.14) Unspectacular or what?! But such was the helplessness of the lepers, humanly speaking, and such was the news that they had heard from someone about what this man, Jesus, had shown Himself capable of elsewhere, that without seeking any further or more obviously confirmations they set off to go and see the priest in the hope of being declared clean and of being allowed to return to their loved ones and take their place in society again. At the time of their setting off to see the priest there was no physical evidence of healing and we are told that it was 'as they went' (v.14) that they were cleansed. It took *faith* for the ten lepers to act upon Jesus' word.

I dare say that brings a challenge to each and every one of us this morning. Think of the times you have cried out to God in desperation, conscious of your need and feeling that Jesus is your only hope. It's a miracle you need but the message you hear from the pulpit or as you open your Bible is unremarkable, something that you have heard many times before: Jesus says, 'Follow me;' Jesus says, 'Trust in God;' Jesus says, 'Do not be afraid.' Or, worse, you are told that the way forward involves getting on with what you have always done within that most human and flawed of institutions, the Church. 'Go, show yourselves to the priests,' says Jesus to the lepers. These were the very people who had proclaimed that they must be exiled from society. 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And they *did*. 'And *as they went* they were cleansed of their leprosy.' (v.14)

Christ does not call us to have faith in religion or in ritual. He calls us to have faith in Him. While sometimes He moves in mysterious and miraculous ways to meet our need, but far, far more often than that He uses the utterly ordinary (and even sometimes the things that we despise) to minister to our needs. Perhaps it takes even greater faith to do the ordinary in response to the Lord than to expect a miraculous intervention. Do you remember the story of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings chapter 5? Also smitten with leprosy, he had come to Israel to the great prophet Elisha looking for a cure. When he arrived at Elisha's

house, the prophet didn't even come out to speak to his illustrious foreign visitor but sent a messenger to tell him to go and bathe seven times in the River Jordan. He was incensed at having come all the way from Damascus to be asked to wash in a much less significant river than those of his homeland. Whatever it is that Jesus is calling you to do as you cry to Him, however ordinary and insignificant it may seem, just do it and in taking Christ at His Word you will begin to see changes in yourself, in your circumstances and in the world around that you never dreamed of.

Which brings us, finally, to the most obvious message of this passage that I mentioned at the outset. Of the ten in the story who were cleansed from their leprosy only one returns to say thank you, notably not even a Jew but a Samaritan. All the time, people like us are experiencing the transforming power of Jesus in our lives as we cry to Him in our need and put our faith in Him. But you will not be alone in often taking that for granted when the emergency is past, our cry has been heard and we have been rescued. We must assume that the other nine lepers in the story got as far as showing themselves to a priest – they would *have* to if they were to be received back into society – but their response to Jesus went no further than that. They had done what they had to do but no more. But surely the work of God in our lives cannot be expressed in mere ritual – the leper who returned made a real fool of himself, praising God in a loud voice, falling at Jesus' feet – a bit like the woman who broke a jar of very expensive perfume and poured it over Jesus' feet wiping them with her hair as an expression of gratitude for what He had done for her, or King David worshipping before the Ark of the Covenant as it was brought to Jerusalem. What are you grateful to God for this morning and how does that truly make you feel. The response each one of us makes will be different for we are each different and our experiences are all different, but let the expression of your gratitude be all about what you really want to say to God regardless of what those around you might think or what might be expected in the staid old Church of Scotland.

So this morning, if you are in any kind of need (and in reality that is all of us), take hold of the fact that you are not able to solve the problem all by yourself. Come to Jesus in your need today.

If you have been consciously and actively seeking God's help in recent days, then don't necessarily expect a miraculous response. Listen for God's Word to you this morning and no matter how unremarkable its message may seem to you, don't let it pass you by. Take heed to it and trust the Lord to work through it.

And if you have received help or blessing that have changed your circumstances for the better, take time today to acknowledge the author of that blessing with overflowing (perhaps even embarrassing) gratitude. Let the enormity of the fact that God Most High has touched your life today set you free to worship Him with no regard for what anyone else might think.

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