

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 10/09/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, October 9<sup>th</sup>

Luke 17:11-19

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### Are you a ten percenter?

This week's Gospel lection involves the third mention of the journey to Jerusalem thus beginning the third and final section (17:11-19:27) of Luke's Travel Narrative that began in 9:51. As Jesus moves in between Samaria and Galilee on his journey to Jerusalem, He encounters ten lepers. He heals them all yet only one comes back and thanks Jesus. Like many in ancient Israel who took God for granted, there are perhaps many today who take Jesus for granted and act more like the nine lepers who never looked back. How many Christians today are willing to share their faith with others? One in ten?

#### Luke 17:11-19

*<sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup> and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." <sup>14</sup> When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."*

The setting for these events appears to be somewhere in the border region between Galilee and Samaria which explains why the lepers included Jews and at least one Samaritan. It also illustrates how the shared misfortune of a disease, such as leprosy, can breakdown the social and religious taboos between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Jesus was met by ten lepers (leprosy was the term given to several skin diseases) as he entered a village. The lepers kept their appropriate distance (Leviticus 13:45,46). The ten lepers must know something about Jesus since they cry out to Him by name. They ask for mercy. When Jesus saw them, He put their faith to the test. He told the lepers to show themselves to the priests. The priest's role was to certify that someone previously suffering with leprosy was in fact cured (Leviticus 14:2f). Jesus thus asked the ten lepers to act as though they were cured. We read how "*as they went they were cleansed.*"

We don't know exactly what happened next. We don't know how far the lepers had gone but what we know for sure is that one of the lepers realized he was cured along the way to the priests since he "*turned back.*" This man returned to Jesus, fell on his face at Jesus' feet, and gave Him thanks. Jesus was incredulous that only one of the

ten lepers He cured came back to express gratitude. More incredulous was the only man who came back was not only a foreigner but a despised Samaritan. In the final sentence, Jesus indicates faith as the cause of the healings.

This narrative illustrates both Jesus' care for the outcast and the role of faith in these healings. However, the emphasis of this story appears to be only one of the men that Jesus healed came back to express gratitude. There are some who suggest that the other nine lepers did not immediately come back to thank Jesus because they were following through on what He commanded them to do in the first place - "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" Maybe there is a case to be made here for our religious ritualism and rule following sometimes getting in the way of the important things like giving heartfelt thanks and praise to God. Maybe the emphasis of the story is none of the Jewish lepers came back. The man who showed gratitude was the one least expected to - a despised Samaritan showing gratitude to a Jewish healer. Perhaps the shock value to the original audience is the same as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In many ways the "rejection" by the other nine lepers is analogous to Jesus' rejection in His hometown of Nazareth early in His ministry (Luke 4:16-30). While Jesus preached in the synagogue that day, He talked of Elisha and how only Naaman the Syrian (a non-Jew) was cleansed of leprosy despite there being many lepers in Israel. When Israel rejects God's prophets, He sends them somewhere else. The same for His Son.

The story of the ten lepers connects to yet another story of lepers in the Old Testament: The story of the four lepers in 2 Kings 7:3-20. During the Syrian siege of Jerusalem, the famine had become so bad and food so scarce that four lepers who sat at the entrance to the gate decided they would throw themselves on the mercy of the Syrians rather than just sit waiting to starve to death. If they were to die that day at the hands of the Syrians, then so be it. When they approached the Syrian camp at the break of dawn, they found it completely abandoned as if the Syrians had fled for their lives during the night. The lepers could not believe their luck. They ate and drank their fill and then carried off and hid silver and gold and clothing. At some point during their unbelievable stroke of fortune they realized that "*this day is a day of good news*" (2 Kings 7:9) and by helping themselves rather than telling everyone else, they were not doing right. They went back to Jerusalem to tell the king the good news.

For those who have a regenerate heart, every day is a day of good news! But how many give thanks for this blessing each day? How many are willing to share this good news with others? Less than one in ten? Perhaps Jesus' had better luck with the ten lepers.

Ironically, it is often during the most challenging seasons of our lives that we are humbled and driven to seek God whereas in seasons of great abundance we seem to rely more on ourselves. We forget to whom our praise and gratitude are owed. This is equally true of nations. Today in the West, we have the mindset that we have overcome everything that challenged humans throughout our history. We have created a seemingly infinite supply of cheap energy, we have overcome disease, our technology enables what most humans throughout history would have thought impossible. We have a false sense of security that we are coming close to eradicating hunger, poverty, and inequality and believe we are on the verge of ushering in a global era of peace and prosperity. It is we who are masters of our world. It is we who built this kingdom. No problem is impossible for humanity to solve. Give us long enough and we will conquer death. What a mighty tower we have built! Instead of being driven to worship God for such times of abundance, we glorify ourselves. Humanism is the state religion. We are the divine. Alas, our history demonstrates that such houses of cards inevitably collapse followed by seasons of misery that ultimately lead us back to God.