

Sermon ✝ October 9, 2022

Luke 17:11-19

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I know that I've shared this story on more than one occasion . . . but it really fits for today's gospel lesson.

In the spring of my junior year at Carthage College, I applied to run a summer coffee house in Eagle River, Wisconsin. It was sponsored by a consortium of local churches. It was the early 1970's and folk music was still very much in vogue.

And so it was a prerequisite that the person who would be hired to run the coffee house needed to play the guitar. I didn't play the guitar . . . but I thought to myself . . . "*Really, how difficult can it be to learn the guitar.*" So . . . I checked "yes" in the little box on the application form where it asked if I played guitar.

It was late April or early May when I was informed that I had, indeed, been chosen to run the coffee house. I didn't rush right out and purchase a guitar because I still figured that it wouldn't take long before I sounded like Eric Clapton. However, the reality of learning how to play guitar didn't really begin to sink until I picked one up and tried to play.

It was at that very moment that an important lesson was reinforced: *very few things in this life happen as quickly as we would like.* Which brings us to this morning's Gospel.

It is the story of the ten lepers who appealed to Jesus for healing. And, at first, he didn't really seem to do much to help them, he simply sent them to the priests with the promise that they would be healed; then comes the significant phrase: "*and as they went, they were made clean.*"

This particular story is usually used to illustrate ingratitude. (This is often the text for Thanksgiving). You remember that only one of the lepers came back to thank Jesus for having been healed.

But in the fourteenth verse there is a very significant insight. Healing came to them while they were on the road—and the miracle— instead of happening suddenly and completely, happened gradually as they traveled. It is precisely that *gradualness* that we're going to focus on today.

We want all of the promises of religion to be fulfilled right at the beginning. How many times have you heard someone say; "*If I only had the faith of so-and-so, then of course I would be a Christian.*"

Of course, this is not the way faith is attained.

Faith comes to the person who is on the way . . . not always knowing where they're going nor the destination. Faith grows out of meeting the problems of life head-on. We grow with the years.

I watch the younger generation as they graduate from school and hear them say they are willing to start anywhere . . . along as it's at the top. That may be our desire, but it's certainly not the way it happens. We need to be patient. The older, seasoned Christians in our midst have much to teach us about faith.

The truth is ... life is lived on the basis of enough light for the next step . . . and that is about all we are given. Projections made by sociologists and political prophets never come out quite as they forecast them. There are always unexpected and unseen influences at work that change their foretellings.

In spite of all of our planning, it is the unexpected things that happen that change the whole picture.

When Leslie Weatherhead was president of the Methodist conference in England, he came to the conclusion that most preachers give the impression that their religion always works successfully . . . and that they never had to face struggles or failure. Weatherhead thought that they would be heard more gladly if they could share the truth with their people.

Light enough for the next step is really all we have or that anyone has to guide them. Healing happens to us on the way.

If we wait for complete healing to take place, we will wait in vain. It does not come by waiting but by working. It happens almost imperceptibly day-by-day as we do our duty and are obedient to our obligations.

Agatha Christie, the famous mystery writer, married an archeologist. She joked that she did so because as she grew older, he would appreciate her more.

Our life is an illustration that we are healed while we are on the way.

Which brings us to the most significant element of this message.

All of this means that at the end of the road there is always a miracle for the person of faith. God demands of us obedience and expectancy and faith so that, at the end of our life's journey . . . something so wonderful happens . . . that no one has ever been able to put it into words.

In the summer of 1973, I worked as a student chaplain at the Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The chaplain had a plaque on his wall which read:

*The sign of God is that we will be  
led in a way we did not plan to go.*

Very little that happens to us in this life . . . happens instantly.

Most things happen gradually . . . while we are on the way.

The good news is that God is with us ... all the way. Amen