

Sermon For Sunday October 12 2025

Made Whole by Faith..., Proper 23 (C) – Luke 17:11-19

Throughout the chapters of the Gospel of Luke previous to today's reading, the Evangelist again and again and again presents the Good News through telling stories. He illustrates a series of personal encounters between Jesus and others – sometimes with his followers, sometimes his opponents, sometimes strangers. There were crowds of the curious and hopeful and various individuals – a tax collector, a centurion, a grieving mother, a sinful woman, a man inflicted with demons. As Luke relates these stories, he shows Jesus responding with love and grace and using the occasions to teach the values of God, while challenging the contrasting and distorted ways of the world.

Now, having reached Chapter 17, we find Luke recalling an episode in which Jesus was engaged by 10 lepers begging for mercy. These unfortunates suffered from what we now call Hansen's disease. This malady, known among humans for thousands of years, went untreated in biblical times and caused permanent damage to skin, nerves, limbs and eyes, compromised the immune system, and hastened death. Though it is now known to be only mildly infectious, the ancients considered it highly contagious and forced lepers to stay away from others, identifying their condition by announcing, "Unclean. Unclean," when approached.

As a result, they were excluded from the general society and forced to make their own communities, not unlike leper colonies that still exist in some parts of the world. They became dead men walking – at the mercy of others, ostracized, alienated from the richness of family life and the comfort of communal religious practices.

Like others, the lepers in today's gospel were outcasts who bound themselves to one another out of necessity and because no one else would touch them. All that mattered

was their disease, as evidenced by the inclusion among them of a Samaritan who would have been a hated and shunned foreigner in mainline Jewish society.

This band of 10 had nothing to offer others; nothing to offer Jesus when they saw him coming. But they recognized him, perhaps by his reputation as a holy man, and approached within shouting distance the one they knew by name. They cried out: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Possessing enough inspiration, or maybe just a sense of desperation, they reached out to Jesus with an appeal for healing that went beyond all conventional expectations.

Jesus did not hesitate in his response. He did not back off or require the lepers to confess faith in God. He did not inquire about whether they were worthy. He did not ask anything of them. Jesus saw them and said simply, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

According to Jewish law, a cured leper had to appear before the priests, who would conduct a series of elaborate ritual actions in order to declare them cleansed. The lepers, who had hoped in Jesus, now displayed enough faith to obey him. They immediately left his presence to go to the priests as required and to begin the new lives Jesus made possible.

What Jesus did for them, of course, bore remarkable significance. Not only were they cured of a horrendous, disabling disease, but the cleansing also enabled them to overcome what was perhaps the greater affliction. Now they could return to the community, to become a part of the body that had cast them out. Now they could participate in life fully, restored physically and socially, and surely, experiencing the beginnings of emotional healing.

Yet, we might ask, did they gain everything Jesus hoped for? Did they achieve spiritual healing, as well? We will never know about all of them, but we have assurance that one did – the Samaritan who returned to give thanks. If we wonder what led to his distinguishing himself by praising God and falling at Jesus’ feet in gratitude, we might

speculate that it was easier for him – as a double outcast – to see clearly the remarkable nature of what had happened. More likely, however, it was due to his greater maturity and deeper strength of character.

Whatever the reason, Jesus was saddened that he was the only one who turned back, and he used the one and the nine to teach his disciples another lesson about the values of God. He was clearly disappointed by the behavior of the nine, and in earshot of his followers, he said to the now-cleansed Samaritan leper, “Your faith has made you well.”

In place of the word “well,” some translations use “made whole” or “saved.” There is ambiguity about the Greek meaning, but its use by Jesus surely implies more than simply being cured from a disease. “Your faith has made you whole,” seems closer to the way Jesus used this episode to provide a new teaching. The Samaritan was not simply cured like the others, but experienced something more important.

His response to being cleansed demonstrated that his view of God was closer to what Jesus came to reveal. He acted not out of selfishness to gain certification of his cure, not rushing to the priests without reflection, but paused to put his cleansing in a wider perspective, seeing God as the center of the personal miracle he was experiencing. Before anything else, the Samaritan gave thanks for the chance to renew his life. This was the beginning of his transformation, and it provided a fitting model for Jesus to honor. He was not only cured physically, but he also gained spiritual wholeness.

For us the worshiper, there are several “take aways” from today’s gospel – community, inclusivity and wholeness in the life of the world and in Christianity. Think about Holy Communion this morning – or the powerful fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The moment we experience among our fellow worshipers today, in prayer and at the altar, is unity in its purest form. Receiving the sacrament of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, all else is shut out but the holy context. We are at one with God and one another, in a sublime moment of grace.

In this moment we are made whole. Even if we lose this reality as we go out the door or back to our pews, we know it as a deep truth on which to draw on our journeys of faith. In that moment, we know that everyone is like the Samaritan, freed from alienation and separation from others in a realm of God that includes a circle of universal inclusion.

Luke's story of this encounter between Jesus and the lepers allows him to teach us about the disappointment Jesus felt because the nine failed to give thanks and the joy he experienced in discovering that the Samaritan recognized the deeper truths of God. When Jesus reflects on the difference, he speaks no less to us than the disciples of old. Today we are reminded of the sadness of our Lord when we, like the nine, fail to follow him, but we also are led to emulate the Samaritan. We can take joy in committing ourselves anew to respond in love and gratitude to the grace, forgiveness and wholeness of God that we all can have simply by accepting this freely offered gift.