

Luke 17:11-19

So we pick up the story as Jesus is travelling to Jerusalem. He arrives at a village where there are men affected by leprosy. Leprosy is a transmissible skin condition which, if untreated results in damage to the nerves close to the surface of the skin, sufferers lose sensation in affected areas which leads to injury, disfigurement, muscle paralysis and sometimes blindness. There was no treatment available in Jesus time, so people with leprosy were cast out, hugely stigmatised and rejected by their families and owing to their beliefs at the time leprosy was considered to be a curse from God on account of sin.

Leprosy still affects hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world today in over 100 countries, though today we have a cure.

In our bible reading from today we hear that 10 men with leprosy met Jesus. They would have lived outside the village to protect the rest of the community and so they see Jesus approach first, being on the outskirts. How did they know who Jesus was? Had they heard he was coming their way or was there something in them that just cried out in the presence of God – just as we read in Luke 19 that ‘even the stones will cry out’?

Instead of crying ‘heal us’ – they cry ‘Jesus, Master, take pity on us’. I think that is incredibly interesting – first that they call him Master – what would that mean to the men at that time. What were they saying about Jesus and who he was? And what were they saying about themselves?

Leprosy would have been no respecter of social status and so potentially some of the men had been Masters themselves. They would have had servants who did their bidding. But here they are proclaiming that Jesus is in authority over them. They are demonstrating their subservience and dependence on Jesus for provision of healing. They elevate Jesus and decrease themselves.

Secondly instead of saying heal us, make us well, they ask Jesus to ‘take pity’ on them. What did Jesus pity look like? It wasn’t just kind words, ‘there there’, or encouragements or platitudes, Jesus’ pity took the form of action – he cleansed them. The word cleansed is hugely important. Cleansed meant that superficially the skin was made well, but also that their very selves that had once been deemed unclean (by the then considered connection to sin) had been cleaned on the inside, as well as the outside. Jesus tells them to ‘Go and let the priests examine you’ – the implication is that their obedience would lead to their cure. The priests were the only people who could proclaim that people were cleansed: clean spiritually (their sins atoned for) and bodily cleansed (leprosy gone) and were able to reunite them with the community.

The 10 men didn’t immediately notice their healing. They were told to go to the priest and the passage states that “on the way they were made clean” it was AS they went, AS they trusted, AS they obeyed they received their healing. Now this is a thorny subject which I’m going to dodge – but what I will say is that believing the words of Jesus to be true, trusting and obeying does not mean that everyone will receive healing at the time they pray for it, there is a mystery to it. But in our story, at that moment in time, in those 10 men’s life, it WAS God’s will to heal or cleanse.

When we think about cleansing nowadays we think about cosmetics – ‘because you are worth it’ - a skincare product designed to **wash away daily grime like makeup, dead skin cells, excess oil**. A very superficial action. But Jesus wasn’t just healing their skin, an outward cleaning, he was announcing their souls too had been washed clean, enabling them, with the priests pronouncement to rejoin their community to take up their places in their family and worshipping community. This cleansing was not

superficial – it meant a whole new way of life, a new identity – as restored people. Why did Jesus bestow healing? Because in Jesus eyes ‘they were worth it’. Precious, and made in the image of God.

But what is the outcome to their healings? One of them came back praising God and threw himself at Jesus feet thanking him – a Samaritan. Now Samaritans were considered to be the lowest group of people in the culture – they were a mix of Jew and Gentile, a remnant from when the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians and the Israelites intermarried with foreigners planted there by the Assyrians.

So a man with a different belief system, a mixed heritage, despised by Jewish society was the only one to express gratitude and praise to God.

The story is both an illustration of faith at work and a lesson on the need for gratitude as apprentices to Jesus.

I wonder how often we find ourselves to be The One? How often do we find ourselves with the other 9. We have experienced something of God’s goodness and then we just carry on, not pausing in gratitude or witnessing to God’s faithfulness. Do we treat God’s kindness as if we are entitled to it, as maybe the nine men did, rather than receiving it as an undeserved gift, as the Samaritan did? We think to ourselves “I am worth it”.

I think there is a challenge here for us all. Jesus says ‘Where are the other nine? Why is this foreigner the only one who came back to give thanks to God?’ Having spent a little bit of time helping with Christian courses in prison I can honestly say that men who know their sin, also know deep, raw gratitude for their forgiveness. How deep, how raw is your gratitude for what Jesus has done for you? When was the last time you were moved to praise and thank God? To make it your priority to respond.

Jesus says to the One ‘Get up and go, your faith has made you well’. This one man receives personal affirmation from Jesus. His faith had in part led to his healing, he has been active, rather than passive and by cooperating with God he has found cleansing and wholeness both inside and out. I wonder what sort of life this man then lived?

So what is Jesus saying to us today? Maybe it’s an encouragement to more gratitude, maybe it’s a challenge to a sense of entitlement we might have regarding the goodness of God, maybe it’s an invitation to bring the grime of your life into the presence of God, to cooperate with God in finding healing and hear him say to you “You are cleansed, made clean” washed inside and out.

This morning as we thank God that his cleansing is open to all who will receive it. Let’s just in the quiet receive again God’s restoration, his presence, his touch on our lives and maybe commit again to a walk of thankfulness.

Amen