

Prayer of Preparation:

Luke’s version of the 10 lepers says, *As he entered a village, ten with a skin disease approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”* There’s something profound in knowing that help is near and that all one has to do is cry out, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”* There’s something profound in knowing that Jesus is nearby, God’s mercy is at hand, and healing is near.

Jesus saw the lepers. Jesus saw their disease. Jesus saw the physical distress of having a disease which affected their skin. Jesus saw the mental distress of being isolated, poor, and made beggars through no fault of their own. And Jesus saw the spiritual distress of having no hope and losing faith that they would ever be healed and restored to community. Jesus saw the lepers and Jesus answered. Here’s what Jesus said, ***“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”***

And as the lepers went and were made clean. You would think that this is the end of the story because the lepers received what they were looking for when they were made clean. Yet, there’s more to the story; there’s always more to the story and I’d like to share with you what Jesus did for the lepers which might not catch your attention.

First Jesus commands the lepers to go to the priests, so the priests could look them over and pronounce them clean. There is some ritual that goes along with this; the lepers would need to bring an offering, a thanksgiving to God, they’d have some prayers, and then the lepers would receive the designation of “clean.”

Nine lepers followed Jesus’ command went to the priest as an act of faith and perhaps even as an act of gratitude. Faith in their healing and gratitude to God because God saw, God heard, and God had mercy on them. Those lepers probably went with dancing, shouting, and proclaiming their good news – Jesus has healed me; I’ve been made clean.

So, why didn’t the 10th leper go to the priest? The 10th leper didn’t go to the priest because he was a Samaritan...his scriptures and laws were very different. This may explain why the Samaritan returned. The Jewish priest would not have any authority, or relationship, with a Samaritan to pronounce him clean.

In the end, we don’t really know the “whys” of the 10 lepers, we can make some educated guesses, but we won’t know the “whys” until we meet Jesus. What we do know is that when the Samaritan returns, Jesus says, ***“Were not ten made clean?”***

In the end, Jesus is teaching us about two different things: being clean versus being well. I know you’re asking, Pastor... what’s the difference? Clean is a state of physical being. Well is being made whole. When the lepers saw Jesus passing by and they cried out, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”* they wanted to be made clean. Jesus made them whole. Jesus wanted more for the lepers than a certificate of wellness; Jesus wanted the lepers to have their physical bodies made whole. Jesus wanted their mental bodies made whole. Jesus wanted their spiritual bodies made whole. The lepers request to be made clean was too small of a request...Jesus wanted it all for them, and for us. Jesus wanted them to be clean, certainly, to be within the law. He wanted them to be well, to be whole.

As I studied for this sermon, here’s what the warning, that little bit of knowledge we need to have to make this make sense, I came across:

Verse 14 says, ...And as they went, they were made clean.

But verse 19 says...“Your faith has made you well.”

The Jews were made clean, the Samaritan was made well. The Samaritan received it all: physical, mental, and spiritual wellness.

And once he was made whole, the Samaritan returned to Jesus and showed gratitude. Jesus pointed it out to him and any who had ears to hear: ***“Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”***

When Jesus says this, maybe it was his way of opening minds and maybe even hearts to the idea that their God is not an exclusive line-drawing God, but a God who tears down human-made barriers of difference.

“Your faith has made you well.” Jesus saw in the Samaritan who returned a recognition of relationship. Luke says the Samaritan praised God and thanked Jesus. But Jesus comments on the praise and not the thanks. It isn’t gratitude alone that makes the difference. It’s gratitude that brings one to praise, to an acknowledgment of God’s action and presence in one’s life that brings wholeness. Jesus is here denouncing what the prophets called praising God with lips and hearts that were far from God.

Jesus wants wholeness which comes from action and reflection, from works of faith wrapped in worship and grateful praise. Wholeness which restores us body, mind, and soul.

Response to the Word: