

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

Psalm 111

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

10/09/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

11On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Left Out

Good morning! Do you remember when we were younger how we would pick teams for whatever game the group was playing? We would line up and usually the gym teacher or coach would pick two captains. One by one each person would pick someone to join their team. While it was important to get picked for the “good” team, it was critical to our survival that we at least not be picked last... that was what we wanted to avoid. So you usually spent the entire time agonizing over when you would be selected, a few minutes having seemed like hours. The fear that most of us had was that maybe we wouldn’t be picked at all, that we would be left out, alone.

While that fear was unfounded, loneliness and abandonment are real emotions that have plagued us all. How many of us have felt the sting of being left out in other areas of our lives? How many of us have fought through moments in our lives when it seemed like nothing or anyone was able to break through. We have felt cut off from all those around us, lost and alone. Today is a story of someone else who felt that same pain.

Our Gospel lesson today picks up directly where we left off last week. We encounter 10 lepers who beg for healing from Jesus and who receive exactly that! But one, a foreigner, returns to give thanks to Jesus. It seems straightforward when you first read it, but after a closer inspection things seem odd. One scholar summarizes the issue perfectly: *“...verses 11-19 give some problems to the reader. Was the Samaritan, who lived outside the requirements of Judaism, included in the command to go to a priest? Also, why reproach the nine for not returning when they had been told to go show themselves to a priest for a confirmation of their cure and a release from the status of uncleanness? In fact, their healing occurred in their going, that is, in their obedience. And finally, the statement of Jesus to the*

*Samaritan who returned, 'Your faith has made you well,' seems unusual, since all of them were healed.'*¹

But before we can begin to dissect those problems, we need to step back and discuss two terms that we probably just assume everyone understands but that need unpacking. The first is to define who a Samaritan was. Samaria was a region inside of Israel with Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. It sat along the Mediterranean Sea and was made up of a group of people with a common Jewish ancestry, but that had been mingled with people from other religions and ethnic groups. (It's theorized that these groups arrived via the Mediterranean Sea.) You would think that having a common Jewish ancestry would mean that they got along with their Jewish neighbors... but that couldn't be further from the truth. Samaritans were considered unclean, and after encountering one any good Jew would need to undergo ritual purification before they could return to normal life. Jews would travel days out of the way to avoid the region, even though traveling through it was faster.

Samaritans were often the butt of jokes. The parable we know as the "good" Samaritan was an oxymoron, because there was no such thing as a good Samaritan! In fact, one of the reasons that story was told is that it challenges the assumptions of the average first century Jew who would never have expected a Samaritan to do the right thing.

But in today's text we encounter what is most likely nine Jews and one Samaritan in a region between Jewish and Samaritan land. Our story takes place on the outskirts, the home of all those cast out.

Just outside of town we encounter a group who suffer from leprosy. Now, leprosy is an umbrella term. We often hear in the Bible about the

¹ Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 202.

worst case scenario, what we now know is Hansen's disease, but in the first century it could mean a variety of things. It is defined as a "... *scaly or rough patches of skin; these descriptions indicate conditions that may include psoriasis, ringworm, and eczema, among other maladies. It is likely that leprosy was a general term that referred to several skin conditions in addition to the more serious Hansen's disease... Regardless of the exact definition, symptoms, and diagnosis of these various ailments, becoming 'unclean' is the primary concern that all biblical sufferers of leprosy share.*"²

Things were not good for someone with leprosy. If they were infected with the more serious Hansen's disease they would be forced to watch as they lost control of their extremities, while they literally rotted away and fell off. The disease is spread via touch, and since there was no cure, it was taken very seriously. Regardless of what skin ailment one suffered, they would be forced to stay outside of town. Cut off from family, friends, and any sort of support network. They often set up shop near the main roads so that they could beg for assistance. If they did need to venture into town, they would need to stay a specific distance away from other people, often forced to ring a bell as they walked, shouting "Unclean! Unclean!" Can you imagine that? I have eczema, I would be forced to suffer this same treatment.

So, when these 10 people approach Jesus for healing, we can only begin to imagine the pain and suffering they have experienced. But one of them returns. And it's here that we see the reality that we are dealing with two stories. The first is the healing of the 10 who had leprosy. The second

² "Leprosy." *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. III. Edited by Katharine Door Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009. p. 636.

story begins when the Samaritan returns and gives thanks to God. This man, an outsider among outsiders, has found community once again. Fred Craddock writes that *“when Jesus says, ‘your faith has made you well’ (RSV), the blessing certainly refers to some benefit other than that which all, including the other nine, had received earlier. The verb translated ‘made well’ is the same word often translated ‘to be saved.’”*³

Saved... salvation. That is what this man receives. In his pain and suffering he has found hope once again, hope in a man who dares to travel where others have turned aside, hope in a man who with just the power of his words is powerful enough to cure something that drove its sufferers to hide in shame. Jesus Christ had given that outsider a reason to keep on going.

And two things happen for us! The first is that we too are offered that same hope and love! Those of us who have suffered and been alone are offered a loving embrace as we re-join the community! And second, we are given the great opportunity to do that same thing for those around all of us who have been lost and forgotten! We are never alone, we are never without hope. God’s faith has saved us all, and for this we give thanks and praise. Amen.

³ Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 203.