

*The Other Nine*

Scripture Lessons: 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

Luke 17:11-19, The Healing of the Ten Lepers

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

This event in Jesus' travels through Samaria and Galilee was remembered by the people who gathered as followers in the first century, because many of them saw themselves like the lepers who he healed. They knew there were two miracles in Jesus' healing touch. Their commitment to Christ had healed them both physically and spiritual maladies, and from spiritual illness, too. Their own lives had been changed forever. Long removed from the physical touch of Jesus, they still were touched by his mercy as they gathered together in worship – just like we are here today.

The obvious miracle is the first one. Here were ten lepers who became a kind of community bound together by their need and other's judging isolation. A terrible and contagious disease with no easy cure can do that to you - to some of us. Back then, it was leprosy that made them unclean. Today, it is AIDS or alcoholism or autism that puts an "A" on our chests and makes us walk around as shunned and feared people. There are infectious diseases like this in many parts of the world. There are mental illnesses like this in our own communities. You can find them among the homeless who huddle in our shabby shelters and in the downtown alleys of our cities. You can also find them at some luncheon table most days in St. Matthew's or on Bardstown Road, where women are gathered and whisper the words that have become real for one of them: "breast cancer."

And of course, there are those others who huddle together in a common bond of friendship or in some support group, not because they have some contagious disease or catching condition, but because we are just ignorant and fearful of them and have declared them unclean. Like those Samaritans long ago, they are just poor and under-educated, or live in dangerous parts of town and speak strange languages, or dye their hair purple and tattoo their arms. Whatever their differences, we are afraid of them. And I wonder why we never ask if they are afraid of us, too, because we are so different from them?

From the distance, we fear getting too close to their problem more than we want to touch them with some healing compassion. So we spend our time making sure our neighborhoods are isolated from trouble and our travels don't take us through undesirable places. We spend our personal dollars in ways that keep us distant and take us away from their troubles, and we

spend our public tax money more willingly on distant terrors than on the fears we do not want to face-up-to close to home. Are we afraid that if they touch us, we might be healed of some of our hidden spiritual leprosy?

Our closer, spiritual fears are harder to fight. In the long run, I wonder what would happen to our overwhelming fears if we just had enough faith to choose courage and compassion. What if, like Jesus, we reached out to these modern lepers who are close enough to touch? What if we got involved to give them sanctuary and healing in our own sanctuary? What if we got to know some of them by name instead of by label of their disease or difficulty?

We hesitate even at the thought, don't we? It is easy to excuse ourselves by saying, "Well, Jesus was God, and he could just touch lepers and heal them." But I'm not all that sure it was all that easy for Jesus, either. After all, he was human, too. So he had to get over his fear of lepers.

Look at the people we admire for their courage and compassion who do reach out. We could start the list with our friends down at Wayside Mission or the Healing Place or the "Patch" or Kentucky Refugee Ministries or any of Second's partners for missions. You could make a long list of sanctuaries where modern lepers find healing from people who are *not* Jesus - they are just trying to act like him. And they see miracles all the time. And when *we* get beyond our fears and get involved - literally - "hand-on" with these people some amazing miracles of healing can happen to them - *and to us!*

That is the real reason that we do "missions" inside the church. We want to teach each other *how* to be involved, and see that miracles happen *through* and *to* us. Oh, we want you to be involved out there in the community, and a lot of you are. But we want you to be intentional as a follower of Christ in your involvement, to take the lessons you learn in this sanctuary and turn places into the community into sanctuaries of compassion for modern lepers. So, we ask you to give your money to these places directly where you can leverage your influence for Christ, and to give to the church so that we can build these compassion laboratories where we can experiment and learn to do mission with Christ. Of course, we need your pledge to help re-build our financial commitment to missions in the budget at Second. But it is more important that we follow Christ's example and get involved "hands-on," so that physical and spiritual miracles happen to lepers of all kinds. And so that we discover spiritual miracles can happen to us, too.

Remember I said there were two miracles in this event with the ten lepers? The first was more successful than the second. All ten were healed of their disease by their faith. But only one of them had a spirit transformed by his gratitude to the source. Jesus wasn't surprised he came back. In fact, he was wondering what happened to the other nine.

The real miracle in the passage is the spiritual transformation from preoccupation with the physical to focus on the deeper and more real spiritual life that we have all been given. These lepers had a miracle that changed their lives, that healed their disease, that removed their isolation from community. Of course, they were excited and amazed. Of course, they were full of hope at what the new day would bring. Of course, they were dreaming of rejoining friends or changing jobs or whatever they could do now that their troubles were gone. They were excited that they could touch someone! Finally, they were clean and could touch someone. They could have a life like most all of us have always had.

Like some others in the miracle accounts of scripture, these healed lepers needed a second touch. They needed that second miracle of the Spirit that touches us with gratitude. *It is the miracle of living with gratitude that changes the direction of our lives, that brings us back to Christ to find out what he wants us to do in the new wealth of all the things we could be doing with full lives.* Let me say that again. Some of us healed lepers need that second miracle of the Spirit that touches us with gratitude. ... *It is the miracle of living with gratitude that changes the direction of our lives, that brings us back to Christ to find out what he wants us to do in the new wealth of all the things we could be doing with full lives.*

Jesus was grateful for the one who came back, but think what he could have done with the other nine. Think what his church can do with ten people who have been healed and are grateful to band together to do a project for one of our partners or offer communion to our homebound or decide to go on a mission trip to Mexico with our friends at Peace Pres. Think of how we can be blessed in the miracle of the second touch at Second Pres, if we let our gratitude become the major motivator of our lives. Think of how much we can do when we focus on how much we have been blessed. Think of how much we can give when we remember how much we have been given.

So, I know it is October and it is way too early to be seeing red and green that belongs in December. But it is never too early for Thanksgiving. And the end of all of our worship to a faithful Savior, even in our worship service, is always to give an offering of Thanksgiving – to dedicate our lives out of gratitude for the the gentle way that Christ has touched us with grace, and to resolve to live “hand’s on” for Christ.

Make sure this week that you touch a modern leper some time, some where. Make sure that you take a step closer when you want to turn and increase your distance from some problem. Change some direction of your busyness, and get involved “hands-on” with a place or problem that is just a little scary for you. Change some slot in your busy schedule to make some activity that is superficial become a time for spiritual growth.

Christ has reached out to you in this worship, and the Spirit has touched that place of need in your life where you need healing, or place in your spirit where you can give thanks. So, offer your prayers of thanksgiving. Give your gifts of gratitude.

“O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!” is the chorus that the oldest hymns of the Psalms repeat over and over and over again. Let’s just sing it responsively as the chorus for this lesson from the lepers.

“O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!”

“O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!”

“O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!”

Now, I hope that you sing the chorus all week long and come back next week full of gratitude to make your offering, and to ask what else Christ may have in mind for you.