

## *Help! Wow! Thanks!*

Luke 17:11-19

Sermon by Mag Richer Smith

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

IN **Guatemala City**, one of the **biggest garbage pits** in the world can be viewed from a cemetery **overlook**. And from that **vantage point**, one can see people **moving about in the trash**, making their **homes** in the **squalor and stench**, **scavenging to eek out their subsistence** while **vultures** are hovering overhead.

THIS is not unlike **the setting** of our text: Lepers are dwelling in the **garbage pit** of their day... It lies **outside** the WALL, on the **margins** where the **UNACCEPTABLE, UNWANTED folks** dwell.

And what we hear as the lepers emerge from the shadows are the **clanging of BELLS** around their necks... and **shouts** of **"UNCLEAN!** warning others to **stay clear**, while **arms (minus thumbs & fingers) beg for scraps to be thrown in their direction**.

LEPROSY was the **most dreaded** form of **social ostracism** in biblical times, and the book of LEVITICUS gives **LEPERS these** instructions:

*"Let those who have the disease wear **torn clothes** and let their **hair hang loose**, and cover their lips and cry. "**Unclean! Unclean!**"*  
*"And the leper shall **remain unclean** as long as he has the disease and shall  **dwell alone** in a habitation **OUTSIDE THE CAMP!**"*  
**Lonliness, Isolation, Humiliation ...**  
 And  **anyone can catch it!!**

Anyone...no matter how good or healthy we've have been..  
**WE** can get it too!

- It's that **diagnosis** we have *dreaded*
- The **break up** we did *not want*
- The **family scars** we did *not deserve*
- The **troubles** we did *not expect*.

Though **LIFE OUTSIDE THE CAMP** may NOT seem like the **normal** place of **residence** for **privileged** people, We **all know** something about the garbage heap of life. BECAUSE as Anne La Motte reminds us:  
**"WE'RE ALL SCREWED UP, BROKEN, CLINGY, AND SCARED, EVEN THE PEOPLE WHO SEEM TO HAVE IT MORE OR LESS TOGETHER."**

**LEPROSY IS CONTAGIOUS AND NONE OF US IS IMMUNE FROM SHAME or PAIN.**

But on this particular day, there is a

**FLICKER IN THE DARK, a WHISPER of HOPE**

And his name is JESUS.

AND HE'S is "on his way to Jerusalem" to

*SUFFER outside **THE WALL***

***OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE.***

And TODAY HE'S in that MARGINAL BORDERLAND WHERE NOBODY'S AT HOME,

*choosing to walk where humanity's aching bells are clanging...*

**Here he is and we can see him...**

- **sitting with those longing for asylum**
- **hanging out with all the world's fears and restlessness...**
- **protesting all that's UNJUST,**
- And **Embracing** those whom society has deemed *unwell & unwelcome.*

We see this Jesus **anytime someone risks** leaving their own **comfort inside** the camp to venture into another's experience of **exclusion, abandonment, suffering & loss.**

Jesus **goes to the edge** on behalf of humankind...

And the lepers recognize him!

*"Jesus, **Master!**"* they cry,

***"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"***

It is **the** ULTIMATE cry for HELP ! the **Kyrie...**

OUR HEART'S **longing for liberation,**

and the WORLD'S **yearning for healing.**

***Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!***

***KYRIE ELEISON!***

**IT is the PRAYER God ALWAYS hears!  
Because God is all-merciful.**

So let us join the LEPERS in their heartcry today  
(#144 in the blue book). We will sing this once,  
hum it 2 times and then sing the words once more.

***Lord, have MERCY!***

**On your fractured earth...**

**On the people of Yemen,**

**On the refugees fleeing violence,**

**and on all who dwell in the garbage pits of life**

**longing for a Way to hope~**

***LORD, HAVE MERCY!***

**On ALL of US who are ACHING,**

**Grieving, weary, afraid,**

**And on all that holds us captive**

**& keeps us from walking free.**

***Jesus, Master, Heal us with your MERCY.***

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Now Jesus doesn't **run** toward the lepers with his mercy...  
(There is no **spittle** or **mud** or a **recognition of FAITH**)  
There is simply an invitation to **walk in trust**:

***"Go show yourselves to the priest."***

**Jesus** sends them out **from the margin outside the wall~ to the center** of the City,  
calling these **outcasts** to a radical **belief in their own dignity!**

There is only 1 reason for a leper to go to the priest and that is to **receive a diagnosis:**

*Clean scans/ or messy tumors?*

*Valid members of community or unwelcome?*

**"clean or unclean."**

So **all 10 take to the road** and

**"As they go"** they **experience healing**

**AS THEY GO...**

*Healing does not usually occur overnight... IT is a JOURNEY.*

*BUT... little by little as more is entrusted*

**to the Divine Lover's saving grace,**

**more and more healing is experienced.**

Cleansing for the LEPERS happens **as their**

**"souls feel their worth"...as they move from** the garbage heap on THE MARGINS, and ever-so- gradually, **LET their "BELOVEDNESS"** soak into their **self-doubt.**

Here they are EXPERIENCING **THE "WOW"** of the GRACE that says,

**"THERE YOU ARE AND I LOVE YOU THERE**

**as MUCH AS I WILL LOVE YOU ANYWHERE.'**

(Right where you're sitting today).

**THIS IS THE MIRACLE OF HEALING.**

All 10 move **forward trusting** that LOVE~ right here, right now.

AND **1 turns back**... this one (whose bell has long rung out all that he is NOT~ all **his LACK**) is *now singing* a song that *overrides* that **old death knell** & like the poet of Psalm 30, he declares:

*Lord, you have turned my mourning into dancing...  
Taken off my sackcloth  
So that my soul may praise you & not be silent...  
O my Lord, I will give you THANKS forever!*  
The **10<sup>th</sup> leper's return** is no quiet Thanksgiving Day, but a **passionate LOUD spectacle of Praise and Gratitude.**

And he is a **SAMARITAN!**

...the enemy (who will continue to be **harassed, bullied** and **unwelcome** inside the camp in Jerusalem, (no matter if he is healed of his dis-ease or not). But he has stopped *giving POWER to others to define him* & make him WORTHY. (It's not about what others think.) His *identity is now in BEING the "BELOVED"*, & he CLAIMS IT and comes back, **bowing** before Jesus, **laying his face in the dirt in unabashed GRATITUDE!**

Jesus **welcomes this lavish response**, but GRIEVES the **lack** of gratitude among his **own people**:  
*"Were not ten made clean?  
But the other 9...where are THEY?  
Was none found to RETURN & GIVE PRAISE to GOD, except this FOREIGNER?"*

Jesus **longs for his own people** to *RECOGNIZE* the gift.

*"Where are the other 9?"*

They are **cured** of leprosy,  
and will likely be **reinstated** into community...  
But thus far, they have **not experienced** the  
**deeper healing** the 10<sup>th</sup> leper knows:

The healing that has **taken in the LOVE of GOD** and  
**makes us ever-grateful!**

We were **made to PRAISE.**

Scientists have learned that the **brain stores music** in  
**both** its lobes, so music fills our **whole being** and pours  
forth from us, even when **language and cognition** are  
gone. Music is the **vessel of PRAISE.**

People who work with **children** in the area of their spiritual  
development have discovered that the **prayers of children**  
up to ages 7 or 8 are almost **exclusively** prayers of  
**THANKSGIVING.** But praise and gratitude grow more **dim**  
with our adult **cynicism.**

An ancient **proverb** says:

***"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to hold both Resentment &  
Gratitude at the same time."***

Maybe that's why **my Most gracious friend's mantra** is:

***"THANKS BE TO GOD!"***

-And maybe that's why when I **am leveling a complaint** at  
my spouse, he frequently stops me and says:

***"Tell me 3 things you love about me!"***

When I can get there after being **stuck** in a place of  
FRUSTRATION & **ANGER, Gratitude FREES me!**

THE 10<sup>th</sup> leper experiences LIBERATION

and the word in Greek is "**SOZO**"...  
 which means: **SALVATION/ WHOLENESS/ SHALOM.**

**"Get up,"** Jesus says, **"Go your way."**  
**Your faith has saved you, made you well &**  
**offered you shalom.**

Joan Chiddister says that  
**"to be saved is to see Jesus there on the edge,**  
**ready to receive OUR tattered souls...**  
**To know that in our descent into the darkness,**  
**God will be there holding & offering us hope."**

Desmond TUTU says:  
**"to be saved and made whole is to grasp God's dream**  
**for a WORLD whose ugliness, squalor, poverty, wars,**  
**hostility, greed, competition and alienation**  
**is TRANSFORMED!**

**It is to know the world as 1 human family**  
**and to know ourselves as the beloved.**

Wm. Sloan Coffin says:

**To be made whole is to believe in Jesus because**  
**we have seen him change:**  
**Addictions into freedom/ Hate-filled relationships**  
**into loving ones/& the fatigue of despair into the**  
**buoyancy of hope. What is important is not that**  
**CHRIST is GOD-LIKE...**  
**But that God is CHRIST-LIKE."**

And all of these people of faith tell us that  
**SALVATION** frees us to **GRATITUDE**,  
**& Gratitude** frees us to **FORGIVENESS**,  
**& Forgiveness** frees us to **SHALOM & WHOLENESS!**

**Yvonne Dilling**, who served in Honduras with the Salvadorian Refugees, wrote about the structure in those camps: "As soon as the refugees begin to make a new camp, they set up **three committees**:

A committee for **education**,  
 a committee for **construction**,  
 and a committee for **JOY!**

**CELEBRATION and Praise** is as basic to the life of the refugees as **teaching their children to read & building a latrine.**"

Dilling says, " *I am convinced that those people on whose behalf we often feel so much **discouragement and guilt**, would be **absolutely thrilled** if **WE WOULD LET LOOSE** once in a while, **ABONDONING OURSELVES** to some good old **PRAISE and THANKSGIVING!**"*

*If we want our lives to be converted to **be at one with those who suffer**, and **advocate** for **healing for the lepers** in our world, then we need a deep **conversion to GRATITUDE, PRAISE, JOY...***

*To giving **thanks for WHO GOD is...***

**The God** who is **Christ-like..**

**The God** who in Jesus goes to **the border, outside the wall...**

*Descends* into the **garbage heap of our lives**,  
 Listens to our heartcries and offers:

***MERCY upon mercy upon mercy,  
Reminding us at every turn that we, Like JESUS,  
are GOD's own BELOVED, and that is enough.***

**So we are invited today to join that LEPER whose soul has felt its WORTH in his LOUD, passionate THANKSGIVING and PRAISE...Let us sing our praise to the GOD from whom all blessings flow!**