

Pentecost 21 – October 9, 2016  
Ten Lepers Healed – One Returned Praising God  
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c  
Psalm 111  
2 Timothy 2:8-15  
Luke 17:11-19  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR  
The Rev. Dorothy Cottingham

Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.  
Gracia y paz de Dios, el Padre, el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo.

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Ten men with leprosy are healed.

Only one returned to say thank you.

And Jesus has a few choice words to say about that.

We continue on the way to Jerusalem where Jesus will be arrested,  
tortured and murdered.

These many weeks are preparing us to carry on Jesus' ministry  
after he returns to the Father who sent him.

We are somewhere between Galilee and Samaria.

That geographical location is important.

It is more than a physical border.

It is an ideological border between the Temple Jews and the outsider Jews.

Jesus and the disciples are standing on the border

between the regions of "us" and "them".

On the margins.

And further out on the margins stand 10 men who have leprosy.

Jesus is faced with a tough call.

The Torah . . . the Jewish book of the laws, we know as the Pentateuch,

the first 5 books of the Bible,

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The Torah, revered by Jews, Jerusalem Jews and Samaritan Jews

contains strict rules about cultural behavior.

One of those rules pertains to today's story.

Anyone with a skin disease was considered a leper.

Jesus knows the laws regarding lepers and leprosy.

Lepers could not freely move about in the community.

They were prohibited from participating in religious rituals.

If there was a sore on your body diagnosed as elephantiasis, psoriasis or  
any number of other skin lesions,

you were set apart from the entire community,

family, neighborhood, church, work . . . everything.

Through no fault of your own, because of your diseased skin,

you were ostracized, shunned and sent away

to live in a colony with similarly diseased people.

Remember the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s?

We didn't know exactly what caused the disease and we knew it was bad.

Health professionals deduced

that the highest incidence was among homosexual males.

As a result, the entire gay population was set apart, shunned and abused.

So it was with the lepers in this story.

The rules required that the lepers keep their distance from the general population.

They could beg for alms, but they could only make their presence known

by shouting across the prescribed distance.

They were the outcasts.

One of the men with leprosy in today's story bore an additional label . . .

he was a Samaritan Jew.

The Samaritans and the Jews did NOT get along,

in fact they detested one another.

The Samaritans were Jews who remained in Israel following the Babylonian exile.

The Jews who went into exile and then returned to Jerusalem

looked down on those who chose to stay in Samaria.

The Samaritans worshipped in a synagogue, not the holy Temple of Jerusalem.

The Samaritan Jews were not proper Jews.

It's not unlike the denomination wars we experience these days . . .

who has the right practice,  
the right biblical translation,  
the right music,  
the best . . . whatever.

One of the ten men with leprosy was the “wrong” kind of Jew,  
he was a Samaritan.

He was an alien,  
an outsider among the outsiders.

Jesus does not differentiate among the men with leprosy.

He tells all ten to “go and show yourself to the priest”.

In order to be allowed back into the community,  
the leper must show a priest that he is cured.

Like getting a release from your doctor that you are no longer contagious  
and can return to work or school.

Jesus says nothing about healing or faith at this point.

Jesus simply says . . .  
“go and show the priest”.

And they do!

Even the Samaritan!

They all know the drill.

And all ten see that they are healed,  
including the outsider.

So, they did what Jesus told them to do, right?

But here's the important point to recognize . . .

Only the foreigner returns to the source of his healing

Acknowledging it is a gift from God.

Luke tells us that the Samaritan returned, praising God with a loud voice!

He was not subtle in his thanks;

he let everyone know what great things God had done for him!

Today, Luke demands that we focus our attention on

God's mercy to outsiders and insiders equally.

Jesus sharpens the focus on the foreigner,

the one who returned and praised God.

After the Samaritan saw that he was healed . . .

he actually noticed that his body was restored to health

AND he realized the source of the healing.

The others saw their healing, also

but failed to recognize the source of their healing.

The foreigner returned to the source of the healing and praised God for it.

Remember the shepherds,

the wretched, despised, distrusted shepherds

who went to the manger to worship the infant Jesus?

They, too returned to their fields praising God for what they saw.

The disciples who witnessed Jesus' glorious ascension

returned to Jerusalem with great joy

where they continually blessed God in the temple.

Let's take the hint . . .

it is our job to unashamedly praise and thank God for all of God's mercies.

The words of our communion litany are an unashamed song of praise

. . . "and so with the church on earth,

with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven,

we praise your name and join their unending song . . .

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might!

Heaven and earth are full of your glory!”

This was the song of the foreigner.

Shouting at the top of his lungs “Glory to God!”

I can imagine Jesus laughing with delight at the man’s exuberant praise.

Jesus tells the healed man to rise up from his prostrate position and GO!

Go on your way, your faith has made you well.

Beyond physical wellness, to wholeness in body mind and spirit.

His faith is literally his salvation.

Good news, friends!

Through Jesus, God empowers us to step across boundaries,

visible and invisible to share God’s mercy with everyone we meet.

In God’s kingdom there are no boundaries.

All are welcome in this sanctuary.

All are welcome at this table.

Who will tell the foreigner that God’s grace and mercy is their healing?

Get up, go, your faith has made you well.

Get up, go, tell everyone what God has done.

When our liturgy is ended today, and every week, what is it we say?

Go in peace, serve the Lord, remember the poor...

and the people respond? . . .

Thanks be to God!