

“Let Faith Arise—Part 2”
October 9, 2016
Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Text: Luke 17:11-19

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Introduction

Today's message is about healing. We are at part two in our October series called "Let Faith Arise," in which we are working our way through passages in the Gospel of Luke on that topic. My hope is that through this series we will learn more about faith and that faith itself will be stirred up in us. Much ministry can be accomplished with faith, and my prayer is that your faith will indeed arise.

In today's reading we hear about faith and how it relates to healing. Jesus is on the road. He is moving toward Jerusalem; on his journey through the land, which is how he spent much of his time in the last three years of his life on this earth. His is a ministry of adventure; each day not knowing what may happen and who may show up on the road.

And today,

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus is going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

The Razor's Edge

He is walking through that place of division. It's a place of rivalry and hatred going back through generations; traced backed to the split between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel, 700 years before Jesus.

There is a sharp difference between Galilee and Samaria; but there is Jesus going between the familiar and the unknown, between the safe and the hazardous, between the friendly and the hostile. Walking that razor's edge that is the life in the ministry. That's the path we take sometimes when we follow in the steps of Jesus.

Why? because God's desire is to bring healing, and stepping into the danger zone is sometimes where you have to go. It's what the saints do. Think of Mother Theresa and how she went into the gutters of Calcutta and found her healing ministry attending to the needs of thousands over several years. Think of the people in nearby hospitals who work the cancer wards attending to the needs of their patients. Think of UMCOR who is once aging heading to Haiti to be the hands of healing. God bless them all.

Lepers

Then Jesus enters a village, Luke writes, and ten lepers approach him.

Look out! It's the lepers. Leprosy is something you do not want. It's a scourge of a disease; a slow but steady disintegration of the body; manifested in sores and rotting flesh. A physical illness of course, but considered at the time tied into the spiritual as well. A curse, if you will. Much like the early days of AIDS when ignorance gave rise to fears that somehow that horrible disease was punishment from God. Not true. Disease in any form is a work of the enemy; the forces that attack the good work of the Creator; the disruptive elements that antagonize God's peace—God's Shalom—leaving us in a condition in which we need healing.

Leprosy—a chronic condition separating you from community because you are unclean and highly contagious. So, Luke writes,

As the lepers keep their distance, they call out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

They have heard about him. They know his name. They call him Master because they know he is a teacher, and they've likely heard he is a healer. And so they draw near...

It's not easy being chronically ill. Many of you know this. You have been there yourselves, or cared for someone who has. There is pain. Someone told me a few days ago how they were having the worst day of their life because of the pain caused by rheumatoid arthritis. There is frustration. Like many others in the narratives of the gospels, these lepers have reached the point of desperation. They are crying out for mercy. Because of their condition, they have not been treated with mercy for a long time. They have been removed from community, put out to perish. This is the life and death of a leper. They need healing.

And here is some good news: Jesus never met a leper he didn't like. Something has renewed their hope; someone has re-ignited their faith. That would be the reality of Jesus walking into their lives. Let that kind of faith arise!

The Healing

And then comes the healing. And it's a different kind of healing. There's no laying on of hands, there's no special prayer, no fanfare at all. According to Luke there is only a command:

When Jesus sees the lepers, he says to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

He is talking about the ceremonial inspection at the temple where you could be designated clean or unclean by the priests who follow strict laws and guidelines for the ordering of the society. They are gatekeepers determining who gets into temple and who is barred because they are unclean. *"Go and show yourself to these priests,"* Jesus says.

And as they went, they were made clean.

And there's the healing. As their feet begin to move along the road, they look down and see their skin begin to clear. Their sores go away, their pain is relieved, and they are no longer contagious. Simply walking as Jesus commanded them to, they experience healing. Lepers no more. And off they go to the temple to see the priests.

Samaritan Gratitude

BUT...one does not go. One of the ten does something different.

One of them, when he sees that he is healed, turns back, and praises God, Luke writes, with a loud voice. He prostrates himself at Jesus' feet and thanks him.

And he is a Samaritan.

Ah, of course he wouldn't go with the others to the priests. He practices a different religion. He is one of the despised *Samaritans*. But he thanks Jesus for his healing.

"Were not ten made clean? Jesus asks. But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

You would not expect this from a foreigner, especially a Samaritan; someone not in the habit of associating with Judean or Galilean Jews. And yet, there he is, face down on the ground, thanking Jesus. It's not easy being a foreigner in a foreign land. Always suspected, hardly respected, always assumed to be up to no good. But here's some more good news: Jesus never met a Samaritan he didn't like.

And he says to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Let Faith Arise

There is a connection between faith and healing. Faith is that wonderful gift from God that comes and begins to transform lives. It happens when Jesus walks into your situation with a desire to heal. Do you believe God wants to heal you? Let that faith arise.

Do you know that as disciples of Jesus Christ you have the ability, and even the responsibility, to pray for the healing of others in his name? Let that faith arise.

Do you understand that the healing that comes through the Holy Spirit is not limited to a few, select group of people, while excluding others? That there are times, as agents of healing, when you must cross into danger zones to reach the ones who need it the most? Let that faith arise.

Sometimes we are cured of our physical ailments. Sometimes we experience healing at deeper levels; at an emotional level, a psychological level, and even a spiritual level. And sometimes we experience even more; we experience deliverance at

the eternal level. Deliverance comes through a special faith that plants itself deep within and assures us that Jesus is the Son of the living God and that it is his true desire, as evidenced on the cross, for us to be made whole and returned to relationship with the Source of all life.

It is God's desire to heal our physical bodies, our emotional life, our spiritual life. It is God's desire to repair broken relationships. It is God's desire to bring families into harmony. It is God's desire to mend communities and heal divided nations. But I believe God's greatest desire is to be reconciled with us, and to remove from us all the sores of life and the things that cause us pain. How could we not put ourselves at the feet of Jesus and simply give thanks. Amen.