

Luke 17:11-19

17:11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

17:12 As he entered a village, ten with a skin disease approached him. Keeping their distance,

17:13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

17:14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.

17:15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

17:16 He prostrated himself at Jesus's feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

17:17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine?"

17:18 Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

17:19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Sermon: Can You See Where You Are Going?

Ten men cannot see. They aren't blind in the traditional sense. They have their sight – they see shapes and colors just as clearly as you and me. But their eyesight isn't doing them much good. Because despite their sight, they still can't see a future for themselves. They lack hope.

And why should they see a future? These men are lepers. Leprosy is the number one public health hazard in First Century Israel. The condition is highly contagious, and even the slightest trace of leprosy means quarantine, exile, and most likely death. Might as well just resign yourself to your fate, right?

It's strange then, that Alan Culpepper describes this passage about ten lepers who have no reason to see a future, as a passage that is all about sight.

And that's exactly what today's pericope is: it's a lesson about seeing.

Sharon Ringe tells us that Torah required lepers to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" to any passersby. But that's not what happens here. Jesus enters a village. The lepers see him, and keeping their distance, they shout, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." And the text tells us that Jesus sees them.

Luke's gospel reminds us that everyone, even the most unlikely of persons, has the ability to notice the presence of God in their midst. And Luke's gospel reminds us that Jesus has the ability to

see and notice everyone, even, especially, the ones that society refuses to acknowledge.

The text doesn't tell us how Jesus interacts with the ten men. We don't know if he lays hands on them, or hugs them, or offers any physical contact. But his next action gives us a hint. Jesus tells the men to go and show themselves to the priests. In their time, it is only the priests who can declare a person clean or healed. Once your status is both verified and certified, you can re-enter into normal society.

The ten men begin to make their way to the priests, and as they do, they are made clean.

What do you reckon this scene looks like? It's hard to say. Maybe as they start walking away, they notice their skin beginning to magically regenerate. Or maybe it's like when you go to the doctor's office for poison ivy, and they give you a steroid. The rash doesn't go away immediately, but you know the healing process has begun. You have a sense of confidence that normalcy will resume. Or maybe, it was less about anything physical, and more about a sense of acknowledgement. Maybe these men, having been ignored for so long, upon hearing words of acceptance and encouragement from an authority figure like Jesus, or honestly, just anyone beyond their present circle, finally feel restored and whole again.

Whatever the case may be, the text tells us that they are made clean.

Nine of the ten men do not break stride. They high-tail it to the priest. They've got their papers, they're gonna get them stamped, and they'll put this whole ugly mess behind them.

But the tenth man realizes the magnitude of the moment. As he walks away, it hits him that he's healed. Really healed. He's been made whole. And the realization stops him in his tracks. "Praise God!" he says. And he turns back toward Jesus, prostrates himself at Jesus' feet, and thanks Jesus for what he's done. A trip to see the priest can wait, but expressing gratitude for God's gifts cannot.

And oh by the way, Luke reminds us he was a Samaritan.

We often talk about the parable of the Good Samaritan. We even discussed it in worship earlier this summer. Martin Luther King, Jr. notes that as the priest and Levite passed the injured man on the side of the road, they ask an important question: "What's gonna happen to me if I stay here?" But the Good Samaritan asks a better question: "What's gonna happen to my neighbor if I don't stay here?"

Seven chapters later in Luke's gospel, it's another Samaritan who asks the better question. The other nine men who are made clean are rightfully concerned about their wellbeing. They are ready to re-enter the world they once knew. Therefore, they ask: How do I find the priest? But the tenth man, a Samaritan, asks another question: "Have I offered thanks to God?"

The tenth man sees what is abundantly clear: God is present in this moment, God is behind this healing, and God deserves our praise. The other nine men will mostly likely get the pronouncement

from the priest they seek. They'll be deemed clean. But they are not yet fully healed. One wonders what will happen when the next crisis comes along: a debt; grief from the loss of a loved one; a broken heart; an emotional scar that won't heal – Will a priest be able to rubber stamp these problems away as well?

Money, power, medicine, fine clothes and fancy cars, certificates of proof – the things St. Augustine defined as earthly things – they can and do provide temporary relief. They are what we call a cure. But the tenth man sees what Luke's gospel implores each of us to see: God is not temporary; God is not an earthly thing; God is not a cure for what ails us. The writer of Luke tells us that God is permanent; God leads us beyond the earthy dimension; God offers us true healing.

By acknowledging his gratitude for God, the tenth man sees that God is his source, God is his strength, God is the help that steers him through. And like that Samaritan, when we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, we free ourselves from dependence on systems that cannot and will not sustain us. When we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, we are not met by a punitive Creator, but rather, a loving Creator who offers us grace and mercies beyond measure. And when we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, we no longer grope blindly, searching for temporary cures and remedies, but rather, we see clearly a world that offers us wholeness and healing.

When the tenth man realizes all of this, he has to stop and say, "Praise God!!!"

Too often, I believe it's easy for us to lose sight of why we gather every Sunday morning. After all, we're busy people, and we live in a world that demands tangible results. We will be made whole if our weekend is successful. And our weekend will only be successful if we complete our checklist: groceries bought; house cleaned; yard mowed; a Panthers victory we get to watch every minute of; no wait at the K&W for Sunday lunch; Monday's meeting notes prepped on Saturday morning; time with our friends and family; a nap; and on and on and on.

And in such a world, it's not hard to ask, "Does my presence, does your presence, does our collective presence here today make a difference?"

Today's passage offers us a resounding "Yes!!!" Your presence, my presence, our presence is important!!!

When we come to praise our Maker, we proclaim that God is present in our lives. When we come to praise our Maker, we proclaim that God matters. And when we come to praise our maker, we proclaim, however difficult it may sometimes be to admit, that a power much, much bigger than us is at work in the world. And that power is good and decent and pure and whole and EVERLASTING!!! And our every action should acknowledge such a power.

I'm fortunate. I've never been a leper or an outcast. Though, like anyone, I experience my ups and downs. And like everyone, I sometimes wonder if a world full of brokenness will ever be made whole again.

And then I come to Millbrook on Sunday mornings. And I see your faces. And I hear your prayers – prayers of thanksgiving and petition. And I hear your songs. And I receive your embrace. And I am reminded once more of a God who is present, of a God who offers healing, of a God who is at work in us whether we like it or not.

Friends, when we come together to gather in worship, we join the tradition of two Samaritans. We see clearly. We do not fixate on a future destination, hurriedly wondering how we'll make it there in record time. Instead, we pause in gratitude, offering thanks for a God who will show us where to go. Such a route may not always be direct. In fact, it will most likely be hard, and tedious, and tiring, and no doubt inconvenient to our busy schedules. But should we choose to follow such a path, it will lead us to a future full of healing and wholeness. The priests, and the rubber stamps we seek, will still be there in an hour. In the interim, let's turn back, acknowledge the presence of Jesus, pause, and offer our thanks to God.

Oh, the places we'll go, and oh, the things we'll see!!!

Amen.