

August 5, 2018

*"The Ten Lepers"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Luke 17:11-19

Rev. Rebecca Mincieli, 508-548-3050

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." These are the first words spoken in today's miracle story. Ten lepers are crying out for Jesus to have mercy on them. They're suffering, in despair, and they want Jesus to work in their lives with healing and blessings. And Jesus does just that - they are all miraculously cured. God's mercy is abundantly and generously poured out on them. So before we talk about the actual miracle, let's first talk about God's mercy for a moment.

I'm sure many of us here right now feel very blessed with our family, our friends, our health, a good life and more. It is well with our soul, so to speak, because we know that God has worked in our lives and has abundantly and generously showered us with his mercy through the many, many blessings we enjoy each and every day. And for those of us who feel this way, let me remind you, the proper response to all these blessings is for us to use those blessings to show God's mercy to others. We are to be human channels that pour out God's divine mercy on the suffering, the despairing, around us. You know, Jesus did tell us in no uncertain terms, "To whom much has been given, much is expected."

But there are others of us here who are troubled right now and probably feel like calling out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on me." Help me. Cure me. Guide me. Forgive me. Save me. Now when and how God will answer us in our time of need, I can't say. But I can assure you God will be there for you if you keep your faith and trust in him. As he told the psalmist, "Call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you and you will give me glory." Yes, God's mercy is promised to all of us.

Now let's go to the miracle story and see what we can learn. Ten lepers cry out to Jesus. He pours out his mercy on them, sends them on their way and "as they went, they were cured." However, only one of them turns around and goes back to Jesus, praising God and falling at his feet, thanking him. Here, instead of the focus being on God's graciousness and mercy toward us, the focus of the story shifts and we hear Jesus ask some important questions. "Weren't ten men made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Has no one else returned to give praise to God?" Can you imagine hearing him say that, sensing the disappointment and sorrow he must have felt by their "ingratitude." As we think about this, I suspect we might want to distance ourselves from those nine ungrateful lepers, thinking that wouldn't be us. And we might even look at this event as a good Bible story that happened two thousand years ago. But in truth, it happened just yesterday. And probably even already today. And it is all about us.

You see, gratitude is not very common today. In reality, ingratitude, seems much more prevalent. We've created a culture of entitlement and expectation. It's like the story about the dotting mother walking with her young son along the ocean. Suddenly a huge wave appeared out of nowhere, and swept her child out to sea right before her very eyes. The horrified woman immediately fell to her knees, raised her arms to heaven, and begged the Lord to return her beloved son. Lo and behold, just then, another wave reared up and deposited the stunned child on the sand right in front of her. The mother quickly reached out and looked the boy over carefully. She gave a big sigh of relief – he was absolutely fine! But then she stared up angrily toward the heavens, clenched her fist, and demanded, “Where’s his hat?” Where's his hat? And it's just that kind of attitude that made Jesus ask the questions: “The other nine, where are they? Had no one else returned to give thanks to God?”

And so why don't we try and find some of those other nine, and ask them why they didn't return and give thanks. Look, there's one over there. Excuse me, sir, why didn't you go back and thank Jesus for healing you? Shouldn't you show gratitude for what he did for you? *Thank him? Why should I thank him? I had to suffer with that for years. I didn't deserve having that illness in the first place. I didn't do anything wrong, so there's really no need to thank him.* Mmmmm. We can almost hear ourselves in this man, can't we? Perhaps we don't come right out and say it in the same way, but haven't we all thought the same thing. 'I don't deserve all this trouble I have in my life.' But you know, if we stop and think about it, it's not about what 'I think I deserve or don't deserve.' For it's not about where we stand in our own mind, it's where we stand before God. And how do we stand before God? Have we really loved God with all our heart and mind and soul? Do we love others, even those hard to love, the same way we love ourselves? Can we honestly stand before God holy and blameless, demanding “what we deserve”..... “Jesus, Master, have mercy on me.”

Look, there's another one of them. Excuse me, ma'am, you've suffered with leprosy all these years, and Jesus just healed you. Don't you think it would be nice to go back and thank him? Shouldn't you be grateful? *Grateful? Yea, I guess I am? A little. But just look around at what everyone else has – they've got so more than I have. They're the ones who should really be thankful.* Mmmmm. Ever felt envious that way – thinking or complaining – ‘Look at the life other people have – a fancier lifestyle, better health, more money. It's not fair.’ You see, the problem is, that rather than be thankful for what we have, we are ungrateful for what we don't have. But remember the parable of the vineyard workers where those who worked in the vineyard for the entire day were paid the same as those who worked for

only one hour. And they complained that it wasn't fair. But said God to them, "Are you envious because I am generous?" The point of the parable is that God is not pleased when we are envious. ....  
"Jesus, Master, have mercy on me."

Look, there's a third person. Excuse me, but didn't Jesus just heal you and give you a whole new life? Don't you think you should go back and show him how much you appreciate what he did for you? *Oh, no, I mean, I appreciate it and all, but really – he just did what he should have done – take care of me. That's what he's there for, right – to help out when things get rough? Now things are good for me, and that's the way it should be.* Mmmmm. This hits a little close to home too, doesn't it? When we are going through those difficult times, we pray, we go to church, we think about God, we try to live better. But then when our troubles subside, and we're blessed with good times, we often change. We tend to ignore God, and put our time and attention elsewhere. We pursue earthly pleasures and material desires and God takes second place, or third place in our lives. But Jesus said, "Seek God first, and His righteousness, and all things will be given you. .... "Jesus, Master, have mercy on me."

Oh – there's a fourth. Pardon me, but can you tell me why you didn't go back to thank Jesus for his mercy and his blessing and healing in your life? Aren't you grateful? *Oh, of course, I'm grateful, but I just don't have the time right now. I'm too busy. But don't worry, I'll go back to Jesus later, when things calm down and I have the time.* Mmmmm. I'm afraid that too might sound a little like us. 'You know, God, life is just too busy right now – I don't have the time to properly thank you. I've got kids that need to be in different places, parents to take of, my job is demanding on my time, the to-do list is piling up, and my social calendar is filled. But when things quiet down and my life gets in order, then I'll be happy to spend more time with you.' But remember when Jesus visited Mary and Martha. And Mary took the time to sit at Jesus' feet, while Martha was running around, cooking dinner, getting things in order, all harried. He said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing matters. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." ....  
"Jesus, Master, have mercy on me."

I don't think we have to look for any more lepers. We all get the point. We need to be more like the tenth. Full of gratitude for the mercies and blessings God gives us day by day by day. I recently gave a sermon on gratitude where I quoted Pastor J. Ellsworth Kalas, "I am grateful for sunshine, because I've known the rain. I am grateful for friendship because I've experienced loneliness. I am grateful for laughter because of the many tears I've cried. I am grateful for my spouse, my partner, my friends,

because I know the emptiness of being on my own. I am grateful for each and every day I'm alive because I have seen death. I am grateful for all that I have because I realize I have enough.”

This is the attitude that made Jesus say to the tenth leper, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” Remember, he had already been healed. But now he was made well – not only his body, but his soul. You see, an attitude of gratitude makes us realize that God has given us every good gift we have. And that should make us want to turn around and run to Jesus, saying, “Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you Lord!” Amen.