

Where are the Other Nine? — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Luke 17:11-19

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 10-13-19

Here is your assignment for today: I want you to look for Jesus in the text; notice where Jesus is, what Jesus says and what Jesus does. Notice how Jesus relates with the characters throughout the story.

Be aware there are layers of things happening in today's text. First, Jesus is traveling along the border of Samaria and Galilee on his way to Jerusalem and to his eventual arrest and crucifixion. Samaria was part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that had broken away from Judea many centuries earlier. After the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom there were inter-marriages that took place between the people of Samaria and the Assyrians. As a result, there were tensions and hostilities between the Samaritans and the Jewish people of Judea. Another source of the conflict between the two groups was that Samaritans believed that the place to worship God was at Mt. Gerazim in their region and the Judeans who saw Jerusalem as the place to worship God.

The next layer has to do with the rules regarding people with leprosy. Leprosy in biblical times covered

a whole host of skin conditions. If you had a persistent rash, like psoriasis or eczema, you could have been considered a leper. If you were declared “unclean” by the priest as the result of “leprosy” you would have been forced to live outside of the community – to prevent the possibility of sharing your disease. Lepers were required to announce to anyone coming near that they were lepers. Lepers were outcasts in the truest sense of the word.

So, here is Jesus and his disciples making their way to Jerusalem. It appears that Jesus has taken a detour. Most Jews of the first century would have avoided going near Samaria on their travels to Jerusalem even though it would have meant taking a slightly longer trip. Luke doesn't tell us what village it is that Jesus is entering or if it is in Galilee or in Samaria. Based on the story, we can assume it is in Galilee.

As Jesus is about to enter the village, a group of lepers cry out to him from a distance. They call him Master and ask for mercy. Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priest even though they still have leprosy. It was required by Jewish law that when the skin conditions clear up they show themselves to the Priest to be declared clean and to be accepted back in to the community. The men do

not seem to question this instruction to go to the Priest before they are healed. They just go.

It is along the way to see the priest that the lepers are healed. At this moment one of the nine sees that he has been healed and he turns back to find Jesus and to thank him and to praise God for the miracle.

There is nothing, up to this point, that stands out as different from other healing stories in the Gospels. A need is identified, Jesus acts and a miracle occurs. The healing miracles are often followed by an act of praise to God / to Jesus on the part of the one who is healed.

What makes this miracle story unique is what happens next. The one has returned to give his thanks to Jesus and Jesus responds in verses 17 and 18,

“¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’”ⁱ

Jesus knows that this one man was a Samaritan. It is this one man who stops on his way to the Priest to come back and thank Jesus and to praise God for his healing. Jesus asks, “Where are the other nine?” You

could argue that the others are doing what Jesus told them to do – they are on their way to see the priest. So why is Jesus asking the question?

Look at the text again. Look at verse 19 when Jesus addresses the Samaritan, “¹⁹ Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’”

Wait a minute. Weren’t all ten men healed? The text tells us that must be the case, based on Jesus’ statement in verse 17. So what is up with verse 19?

Pastor David Lose in his article on this passage explains,

Jesus says to the Samaritan, "Your faith has made you well" (NRSV, NIV). One might also translate it, as Eugene Peterson does, "your faith has healed and saved you" (The Message). The Greek word ... [used here] can be translated any of these ways: healed, made well, saved. It can also be translated, with the King James Version, "Your faith has made you whole." However we translate it, one thing is clear: there is more at stake here than mere healing.ⁱⁱ

What happened to the Samaritan that is different than what took place for the other nine? The difference is that the Samaritan was not just healed of his skin disease, his life was changed. He was made **WHOLE** through his encounter with Jesus.

We don't know anything else about the other nine but we can assume they saw the Samaritan turn around to go back. There is no indication that they asked the Samaritan what he was doing or where he was going. But imagine you have a just found yourself healed of the disease that has made you twice an outcast – an outcast for being a Samaritan and an outcast for being a leper. We would be beyond happy. We would be so excited. The Samaritan leaves the group to go back and say thank you to the one who made the healing possible.

I wonder if it was this man who cried out calling Jesus, Master. Were the others just seeking mercy – maybe even alms and were they not really looking for or expecting to be healed. In the Gospel of Luke, other than this occasion, the only time Jesus is called Master is by the disciples. It is through this one leper's encounter with Jesus that he is made whole. He is healed not just physically, but spiritually. Jesus tells him that it is his faith that has made him whole.

I asked you at the beginning of the sermon to be on the lookout for Jesus in today's text. To notice where Jesus is, what Jesus says and what Jesus does and for you to notice how Jesus relates with the characters throughout the story.

Where did you find Jesus in this story? And what do we learn from this encounter? We find Jesus bridging the distance between the accepted and the outcast. We find Jesus straddling the camps of those who are okay and those who are broken.

Jesus is within earshot of the men with leprosy. Jesus hears them, he hears their cries and he meets their needs.

But only one of the men, truly sees Jesus.

Pastor David Love, who I quoted a bit ago, suggests that

Taken together, these details orient us to the possibility that Jesus instructs his followers -- then and now -- that faith is not a matter of believing only, but also of seeing. All the lepers were healed; one, however, saw, noticed, let what happened sink in...and it made all the difference.

*Because he sees what has happened, the leper *recognizes Jesus*, his reign and his power.

*Because he sees what has happened, the *leper has something for which to be thankful*, praising God with a loud voice.

*Because he sees what has happened, the leper *changes direction*, veering from his course toward a priest to first return to Jesus.ⁱⁱ

Do you see Jesus? Do you see the healing that is available to you through faith? Do we go through our days and our lives and don't see Jesus? Is it possible that we don't take hold of the life changing encounter with Jesus that is just ready for the asking? Is it possible that we take for granted the blessings from God and forget to turn back to Jesus to say thanks and to praise God? It is possible that we aren't looking for Jesus and so we miss the opportunities to see people and the world the way that God sees them.

When we gather for worship each week, we are given a focused opportunity to see God, to see God at work in our lives, to see God at work in the lives of those around us and to see God at work in the world. Our encounters with Jesus Christ are not limited, however, to our time in worship. The leper encountered Jesus

and the wholeness that Jesus offers going about just trying to live his life and to survive.

There are times where we are like the leper. We are just trying to live our lives and to survive. It is at those moments, if we allow ourselves to truly see Jesus, that our lives can be transformed; that we can be made whole.

We are not told what happens to these men after this event. We do not know what happened to the other nine after they visited the priest. And we do not know what became of the Samaritan after his encounter with Jesus. We are told that, unlike the other men, the Samaritan was made whole – because of his faith.

Let us pray that our faith will be a faith that sees, that it will be a faith that helps others to see, that it will be a faith that cries out to the Master for mercy, that it will be a faith that is made whole.

Please pray with me.

Holy God, help us to learn and know that
“true healing is more than restoration of flesh and blood, or knitting of bone to bone.

True healing is wholeness, where body, soul and spirit unite.

True healing is peace, the knowledge of God’s

presence, a hope that knows no end.
True healing cries ‘Father, not my will but yours.’
True healing knows love perfectly, a love that casts
out fear.
True healing overcomes, endures, for eternity.”ⁱⁱⁱ
Amen.

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (NRSV). New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=783.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.faithandworship.com/healing_prayers.htm.