

## 9.5.2021 Trinity 14 (Luke 17:11-19)

About three years ago, while playing a game of basketball with my kids, I took a hard fall and dislocated my shoulder. That injury was the reason for my last trip to the Emergency Room, but the last time I was there, isn't the only time I've been there. Like many of us, over the course of my life I've made several trips to the ER, Urgent Care, or to my doctor's office due to an injury or illness, and while the injuries and illnesses that sent me there have all been very different, what I'm looking for when I go to see the doctor, what we're all looking for when we see a doctor is the same thing - healing.

When we're really sick or severely injured we want to be healed. We want the pain to stop. We want things to return to the way they used to be, and as selfish as it sounds, the doctor is a means to that end. Your experience with physicians may be different than mine. You might have your doctor's cell phone number, call him or her by their first name, meet them for a Friday night dinner, or vacation with their family, but if I were describing my experience, even with my primary care doctor who I've been seeing for the last 20 years, I'd have to say that what we share is more of an arrangement than a relationship. An arrangement in which I call out for help, he writes a prescription for healing, and once my good health is restored I hardly think of him, and don't contact him again until the next time I'm sick or injured.

The arrangement many of us have with the physicians who work to heal us seems to parallel the attitude of nine of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus in the passage we read this morning. In today's Gospel, we read about Jesus entering into a certain village, where He was met by *"ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger"* (Luke 17:12-18).

*Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?* I believe the answer to that question is found in our own experience with illness and injury. Think about the last time you were really sick or severely injured and went to a doctor to be healed. Where were you once the pain stopped? Where were you when you'd recovered? I suspect as far away from doctors and hospitals as

you could possibly be, and I imagine nine of the ten lepers acted the same way. As they walked, they were healed. No longer was their flesh rotting, no longer would they be considered unclean, no longer would they be forced to live a miserable life separated from the love of family and friends and community.

Jesus had said to them, *“Go show yourselves unto the priests.”* Can you picture these lepers, hearing Him speak these words and recognizing as they went that they’d been healed, running to follow His command? They’d each see a priest, who would inspect them and declare them to be clean, and for those nine, after receiving that declaration, it must’ve been another race to return home, perhaps to see a wife, a son, or daughter; a mother, father, or friend, and with those relationships restored, there would be yet another race as they each set out to see their field or fishing boat, their garden or oxen. They’d been healed, life had returned to the way it used to be, and it appears for nine of the ten lepers that Jesus was simply a means to that end.

*Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? Only one returned to give praise to God. The others, to use the words of Jesus, loved “father or mother... son or daughter...” more than they loved Him (Matthew 10:37). The others would’ve had those familiar excuses if asked why they didn’t return, “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it... I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them... I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (Luke 14:18-20). The pain had stopped. The crisis had passed. They were too busy being well to turn back now, and in their actions we see that nine of the ten lepers desired to receive something from Jesus more than they desired Jesus Himself.*

That’s the real tragedy in this story. Nine of the ten settled. They got the skin-deep, physical healing that they wanted to get from God, but missed the opportunity to receive the fullness of all our Lord intended to give them. They received the healing, but not the Healer, the gift, but not the Giver, the miracle, but not the Miracle Worker, and we must not let that tragedy go unnoticed, because we aren’t above responding in the same way. We’ve been healed and restored and transformed, and yet we can also be so busy being well that we have little time to praise God who made us well. If we’re not careful, we can rush out the front door early in the morning, come home exhausted at the end of the day, and fall asleep with hardly a thought of gratitude toward God. If we’re not careful, we can let our weekends become so filled with all the good gifts God has given us, that we don’t have even an

hour left on Sunday morning to return again to His house to praise, and to receive, not only the gift, but the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

*Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?* They were nowhere to be found because nine of the ten lepers settled. Nine of the ten would prove to be satisfied with a doctor who could treat their disease, but there was one leper who was searching for a Doctor who would treat the patient. One leper, the Samaritan, lifted up his voice, and cried out to Jesus, not to make an arrangement for healing, but to enter into a relationship with the Healer. This man understood that his leprosy was more than a skin condition. He recognized in himself a leprosy of the heart, a leprosy that could only be healed through a continual cry for help and an Infinite prescription for healing.

This leper turned back, and went in a different direction than the other nine. To this leper Jesus said, *“Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole”* (Luke 17:19). Literally, your faith has saved you. As I look at you all this morning, you remind me of him. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that Father makes the *“sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Matthew 5:45). *“God does not show favoritism”* (Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34). He showers His blessings on all of us, and while so many are happy to receive those gifts and go their way, you are not. This morning you *“turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.”* Today, you returned to praise Him, to receive Him, and this morning our Lord and God says to you, *“Arise, go your way. Your faith has saved you.”*