

SERMON

+ Lectionary 28 C (Pentecost 18)

October 12, 2025

In Jesus' day, having a skin disease of any kind
was usually summarized as being a leper.
That's the Greek word
where our reading says, "skin disease."
And whether it's a rash, a boil,
or an outbreak of psoriasis, (Lev 13:1-3)
the consequence for them all
was that you kept your distance from others.

Not that society was concerned with spreading the disease, so much,
or that lepers were regarded somehow as sinners to shun,
but that they were ritually unclean – outside the purity code.
So, it was not a physician who declared you to be a leper, but a priest.
And it was a priest who declared you to be clean again
if the skin condition that you suffered went away. (Lev 13:6)

In the meantime,
to avoid rendering the whole community unclean,
there were certain conditions for daily living and behavior
for those who suffered one of those skin diseases.

You wore a special robe that was torn
that others could see and identify from far away.
You mussed your hair, also for quick and easy identification. (Lev 13:45-46)
And most important, you kept your distance from others.
In the language of the old days,
you lived "outside the camp." (Num 5:1-4)

So most lepers formed their own community, as it were,
and lived on the outskirts of the village,
which, of course, is where Jesus found these ten people.

But you also positioned yourself along high-traffic routes
because you depended on others
for your needs and well-being.

But to prevent others getting too close
and rendering them unclean,
you shouted out, loud and clear, “unclean, unclean,”
because you were. (Lev 13:45-46)

And the other thing you shouted was, “mercy, mercy,”
hoping someone would help out with a handout.
And that’s why these ten people
on the outskirts of the village Jesus was walking toward
kept their distance and shouted, “mercy.”
Except that they called Jesus by name,
and they called him Master.

The story doesn’t tell us how or why,
but they knew something.
And whatever that something was,
it was enough to obey Jesus
when he told them to go and show themselves to the priest.

Now, let’s think about that.
The only reason lepers would show themselves to the priest
was so the priest could declare them clean
when they had been healed of their disease,
and they would be able to be part of the community again,
and be able to be together with their family and neighbors again.

So, it was a leap of faith for these ten people
to look at themselves afflicted with their skin disease
and obey Jesus’ command
to go show themselves to the priest,
because the one did not justify the other.

But you know the story –
they obeyed him and they went,
and on the way, they realized that they were healed.
They were all – all ten of them – healed.
That’s how God works.
Graciously. Abundantly. Mercifully. For all. First.

It doesn't say anything else about nine of them after that.
 We're quick to get judgmental about them
 for not coming back to give thanks,
 but I suspect they were thrilled to obey Jesus' command
 and show themselves to the priest.

So they finished the journey to the priest eagerly,
 with excitement and wonder,
 and they kept going because they were eager
 to be united with their family and neighbors again.
 And maybe they did offer their thanks at the temple,
 and wouldn't that be their thanks to God?
 Who knows? It doesn't say.

But the tenth one noticed his newly cleared skin
 and immediately turned around
 and praised God, shouting as he went,
 and came back to Jesus,
 threw himself at his feet to worship him,
 and thanked him.
 And after Luke describes all these things he did,
 he mentions, oh by the way, he was a Samaritan.

He is an outsider among outsiders.
 He stands out among the ten for several reasons.
 And Jesus wonders aloud why the other nine
 didn't follow his example and return to give glory to God,
 whose power and healing had been shown to them.

So obviously, his story is told
 because he becomes an example and a model for us
 of praise and worship and thanksgiving,
 and of knowing God as the source of all healing and goodness,
 and being thankful for it.

But there's even more to ponder,
 now that we know he's a Samaritan.

Because the Samaritan wouldn't need to go to the priest
and be declared clean.

That was a Jewish law thing

and he was outside the cultic law of the Jews.

It was Mt. Gerizim, not Mt. Zion or Jerusalem,
that was the center of his cultic life and religion.

No Jewish priest would declare a Samaritan clean
no matter what his skin looked like.

He wouldn't even be admitted to the temple to begin with.

So, you see, this Samaritan
is also a model of obedience and faith for even taking the first steps.
He was going to the priest only because Jesus told him to
even though he would receive no benefit
from going otherwise.

This outsider Samaritan
becomes the model of faith and obedience
that the apostles failed to understand
in last week's story.

Today's story of the ten lepers
is the next thing Luke tells us in his gospel
as a commentary on last week's story.

It was the Samaritan's obedience to Jesus
that makes him a model of faith
by going to the priest despite any evidence
that he or the other nine would have any reason to show themselves,
or that he, a Samaritan, would receive no benefit from it anyway.

Apparently, his connection and relationship with Jesus –
whatever that was – mattered so much.
His trust in Jesus was so profound that he went.
And then, when he discovered his healing,
he turned around, praised God,
and came back to Jesus to worship and thank him.

And it was in that grateful and faithful response to his healing
that the Samaritan leper
received what the other nine presumably didn't.

“Your faith has made you well,” Jesus told him.
And that word “well” is literally, “saved.”
That’s what the Greek word is there: Saved.
Not just cured, but well, fulfilled, whole.

Redeemed to the community
and once again living in it.
In a loving, trusting relationship with Jesus
and living by it.
Filled with gratitude for life
and praising God for it.
That’s what makes him whole, well, fulfilled, and saved.

This outsider among outsiders is a model and example
to give hope to any of us who feel like an outsider.
And illness, disease, pain, and suffering can do that to us –
whether it’s physical, emotional, spiritual, or mental.

This healed and obedient servant is a model of gratitude
to anyone who suffers,
anyone who steadfastly obeys,
anyone who experiences healing
whether it’s by medicine, therapy, technology, counseling,
or laying on of hands and anointing with oil.

But mostly, this man redeemed, whole, full, and saved –
this man offering himself in worship of Jesus and praise of God
is a model of faith for all people.
A model of the kind of faith
that is a connection and relationship with Jesus
of trust and obedience
that takes first place in our lives and in our action.

And oh, by the way, this leper was a Samaritan,

an outsider among outsiders.

And that is an example and model for us, too.