

# “One Came Back”

*Listening to God's Word*

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Luke 17.11-19

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*As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he passed along the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into one particular village he was met by ten men with virulent skin diseases who stayed at some distance from him.*

*'Jesus, Master!' they called out loudly. 'Have pity on us!'*

*When Jesus saw them he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were healed.*

*One of them, seeing that he had been healed, turned back and gave glory to God at the top of his voice. He fell on his face in front of Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan.*

*'There were ten of you healed, weren't there?' responded Jesus. 'Where are the nine? Is it really the case that the only one who had the decency to give God the glory was this foreigner?'*

*'Get up, and be on your way,' he said to him. 'Your faith has saved you.'*

(Kingdom New Testament)

This begins as a healing story. Ten men suffered from “leprosy.” In that time, this term covered a myriad of skin ailments. These were physical diseases, painful and disfiguring.

These were also “social disorders.”<sup>1</sup> Sufferers were thought to be contagious. People felt sorry for them, but also revulsion and fear. Sufferers were ostracized, expelled from their families and communities, driven to the edges. It wonder if this social exclusion caused more suffering than the physical symptoms.

This physical and social suffering was also spiritual. Those afflicted were assumed to have sinned, or at least done something to merit God's curse. They were filthy before the Lord, therefore unacceptable, banned from all the things of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Joel B. Green, [The Gospel of Luke](#), New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 623.

Then, Jesus happened by. They cried out for mercy.

## II

We'll get back to that in a moment. Before, though, let me bring you up to speed on an experiment we're trying this fall. Normally, we hear a Bible story or teaching one week, then move onto another the next. But now we're slowing down.

I think of this as like percolation. We're letting ourselves slowly trickle through a small portion of God's Word. Like water through coffee grounds, we're seeping slowly enough to pick up flavour and, for caffeine, let's say "spiritual energy," along the way. Don't rush, and more goodness gets in.

It's a 3-week cycle. We've tried this once already. Today we begin again.

First, we're **LISTENING**. We'll hear this Jesus story a few more times. I'll give you some ideas to think about. Start tasting what God has for us.

Next week will be more of a **LEARNING** time. I'll fill in some of the background and textures of the story. We might notice some new things.

Two Sundays from now, we will **RESPOND**. As God has been getting this story into you, what has it been doing to you? What have you been thinking? Wondering? Realizing? Can you share that with us? Our responding time will be a collection of your responses.

## III

So, **LISTENING**. Let's hear it again, more slowly.

Maybe imagine you are one of the lepers. What is life like for you? There might be something in your own suffering that connects you to theirs.

*As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he passed along the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into one particular village he was met by ten men with virulent skin diseases who stayed at some distance from him.*

*'Jesus, Master!' they called out loudly. 'Have pity on us!'*

*When Jesus saw them he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were healed.*

*One of them, seeing that he had been healed, turned back and gave glory to God at the top of his voice. He fell on his face in front of Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan.*

*'There were ten of you healed, weren't there?' responded Jesus. 'Where are the nine? Is it really the case that the only one who had the decency to give God the glory was this foreigner?'*

*'Get up, and be on your way,' he said to him. 'Your faith has saved you.'*

(Kingdom New Testament)

#### IV

We'll get back to the one who came back in a moment. But what of those who did not return? We might pass by these other nine (I'm sure many people had), or too quickly judge them for not coming back.

But notice some things. They do what Jesus tells them to. He says, "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" Only a priest could certify that they are now healthy and clean in a way the community would accept. These nine follow Jesus' instructions to the letter.

Notice that Jesus never told them to come back to him.

Notice too that they are all cleansed, healed: the one who returns, and the nine who do not.

As we listen again, use your imagination. You've suffered so much, been cut off for so long. Suddenly, everything has changed. It's like you've been born again!

What do you do now?

#### V

This time I'm reading from the *Common English Bible* translation. Listen and imagine.

*On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him.*

*Keeping their distance from him, they raised their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, show us mercy!"*

*When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they left, they were cleansed.*

[Pause: You are one of the 9. What would you do now?]

*One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan.*

*Jesus replied, "Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?"*

*Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."*

(Common English Bible)

## VI

This begins as a healing story, and ten were healed.

It becomes a gratitude story. One comes back, celebrating God as loudly as he can, raising his shouts to the heavens, then falling to the ground, reverently before Jesus, thanking him.

Luke, recounting this episode, has left out a detail. Now he springs it. The one who returns is a Samaritan.

I'll say more about this next week. For now, remember Jesus is in the borderlands between two peoples: Samaritans and Jews. They have a lot in common, and they hate each other. Jesus and his followers, until now at least, are all Jews. In the borderlands, though, you never know who you'll meet.

In that group of 10 sufferers, it didn't matter. Their shared agony united them stronger than any other identities could divide them. This company of misery included this Samaritan.<sup>2</sup>

He is unlike Jesus, unlike our Lord's original disciples, unlike those who were first

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<sup>2</sup> It could be that others among the 10 were Samaritans too. Because the story doesn't say, however, our listeners' instinct is to assume they are like us. I'm not a Jew, but I'm conditioned to identify with them in the Bible.

hearing this. His is an outsider.

The ones who seem like us, the nine, do not come back. The one who is not like us, this Samaritan, does: praising God and thanking Jesus.

What led him to be different?

## VII

One more time, from *The Message* translation by Eugene Peterson. Listen and imagine.

*It happened that as Jesus made his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met him.*

*They kept their distance but raised their voices, calling out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"*

*Taking a good look at them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." They went, and while still on their way, became clean.*

*One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. He kneeled at Jesus' feet, so grateful. He couldn't thank him enough—and he was a Samaritan.*

*Jesus said, "Were not ten healed? Where are the nine? Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?"*

[Pause: What led this one, of all people, to come back to Jesus?]

*Then he said to him, "Get up. On your way. Your faith has healed and saved you."*

(The Message)

## VIII

We'll pick up again next week. In the meantime, let me leave you with this.

This started out as a healing story. Then it became a gratitude story. Then what?

Jesus tells this one who came back to get up. Or, rise. This can be a `resurrection word.<sup>3</sup> He had been as good as dead. Now, thanks to Jesus, he is alive again.

Jesus tells him to get going. Restored to life, grateful to Jesus, and celebrating God, this man now has some place to go.

Where? Where does this healed, cleansed, and saved Samaritan go next? How is he as he goes? What will he be like when he gets there?

What about you?

His answer, and your answer — where you go, what you will be like, what you will do — with God's help, that's what the story becomes next.

Because, thanks be to God, we're not finished.

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<sup>3</sup> *Anistémi.*