

"Wonderfully Thankful"

Learning from God's Word

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Luke 17.11-19

October 10, 2021

As Jesus was going up 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 mercy on us!"

When Jesus saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.

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 made clean, weren't there?" responded Jesus. "Where are the nine? None could be found to return to give God the glory except this outsider?"

"Rise up, and be on your way," he said to him. "Your faith has rescued you."

(My translation, adapted from the Kingdom New Testament)

You are on the road, but you're going nowhere.

It's no wonder. Leprosy is your affliction.¹ Its bacteria has gotten into your skin, nerves, eyes, and nose. Your nerves die. You lose touch. Without pain to warn you, you bang and cut, but don't feel it. Damage grows. Infection sets. You became disfigured.

It's no wonder you're going nowhere. Leprosy is your plague. Though hard to catch, it is contagious. People fear you. People you love and need most step back from you. You couldn't stay at home. You were cast out of town. You have to warn people you

¹ In the New Testament, the Greek term *lepros* is used. It derives from the word for "scale," as in a fish's scale. The word covered a range of similar skin diseases, not only Hansen's disease for which the word "leprosy" is used today (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy>).

are coming so they can get away.

It's no wonder you're going nowhere. Leprosy is your curse. Someone so contaminated is not allowed into places of God's presence. God is all purity, all beauty, and all holiness. You are ungodly. A priest examined you, diagnosed you "unclean," and declared you unwelcome.

Step out of the story for a moment. . . . Us worshipping today, we likely do not have leprosy. Still, is there an affliction that is stealing away your health? A plague that has pushed you away from someone? A curse that has cut you off from God?

Are you on the road, but going nowhere? And you wonder.

II

Jesus is on that road. He is going places.

The Messiah is going to places called betrayal, condemnation, torture, crucifixion, and then resurrection glory. He is going there for everybody. His self-sacrificing, self-giving is to rescue us, and everything.

So Jesus is striding forward with determination.² His journey is to Jerusalem where it has to finish. He is coming down from Galilee where he began. He is in-between, on the road to our salvation.

You're by that road. Going nowhere. All 10 of you. Your patched-together society of sufferers.

You're purposely positioned there to cry out for help. "*Gifts of mercy?*" is your practiced plea. Someone might toss you a leftover. Even a coin. Maybe a kind look, an exchange of eyes. More likely, they'll give a pretending-not-to-see step sideways.

But you've heard of this Jesus. You wonder: might his mercy be more?

III

Step out of the story again. We all heard what happened next.

All 10 cried for mercy.

² Luke 9:51.

All 10, Jesus told to go to their priest. Because only a priest could undo the verdict, end the sentence, pronounce them clean, and bring them back into the community. So they needed to see their priest.

Although, when Jesus sent them, nothing had changed yet. They still had leprosy. Besides, the last time they'd seen their priest, all they'd heard was cursing. Still . . . they went back. In different directions probably, each to his own home village. They went because Jesus told them to. That's trust.

All 10 were cleansed as they went. Un-afflicted, un-plagued, un-cursed.

Now, the twist. One, just one, comes back to Jesus.

More twisted, it's *this one* who comes back.

IV

He's Samaritan.

This one thing sets him apart from the others. It's the very thing that should keep him away.

The story of the Samaritans is not a good one.³ Its details are lost in time, but never forgotten. Through centuries before, God's people of Israel were broken up by civil war, divided into rival kingdoms, fragmented by invasions, scattered by exiles, mixed up through immigrations and intermarriages. Emerging were two peoples: Jews and Samaritans. They share allegiance to the same God, share some of the same Scriptures, share variations on similar traditions. They share the same small land. And living, deadly memories of conflict, betrayal, and violence against each other.

Jesus is a Jew, from the region of Galilee. He's going south to Jerusalem in Judea. Most would take the long way to the east. But Jesus goes straight down, through Samaritan-country.⁴ Dangerous for a Jew. As you'd expect, his first foray into a Samaritan village goes badly. Still, he signals that his approach to *them* is different.⁵ He even tells a story about a Samaritan who (get this!) turned out good!⁶

³ At least from the perspective of Jews. Samaritans would tell it differently. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritans

⁴ www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/3-pilgrimage-paths-from-galilee-to-jerusalem

⁵ Luke 9:52-56.

⁶ Luke 10:25-37.

He's circled back now into the Jewish-Samaritan borderlands.⁷ Then this bunch of lepers. Then he sends them, heals and cleanses them. But one circles back to Jesus with gratitude. This one! A Samaritan.

V

Wonder!

Wonder that *a Samaritan* comes back to Jesus. Wonder that celebrations of God burst from *a Samaritan's* healed lips. Wonder that *a Samaritan* falls at his feet. Wonder that *a Samaritan* says, "Thank you!"

Then again, wonder at what Jesus does for anyone.

No wonder we say thanks.

Following Jesus, being his disciple, entrusting yourself into his hands, springs from wonder-full gratitude for what he has done for you. "Thank you!"

When you give yourself to Jesus, you do not know where he is going to lead you. He might very well take you in directions, to places, into situations, confront you with decisions, and call on you for sacrifices that will push you beyond what you're sure are your limits.

But then again, when you've been on the road going nowhere, anywhere is beyond your limits.

Jesus comes, heals and cleanses you. You are so wonderfully astonished at what Jesus has done. . . . What he has done for you: afflicted, plagued, cursed. . . . What he has done for you, in all your outsider, wrong-sider, Samaritan-ness. . . . What he has done for you on his Road to Salvation, which ended with him who carried no sin becoming filled with yours, so you can be free; with him who is the image of God becoming disfigured with your disfigurement to restore you beauty; with him who merits the praises of angels becoming despised and rejected, so you are welcomed and

⁷ The Gospel of Luke's so-called "Travel Narrative" narrates Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51-19:41). It's geography seems confused. In 10:38ff, he is in Judea close to the city in the home of Mary and Martha of Bethany. Now he's back along the northern border between Galilee and Samaria. Maybe Luke has stitched together various episodes, without having an accurate map in the region in his mind. (Whoever the historical "Luke" was, it is unlikely he had been to the area.) On the other hand, maybe the route Jesus took was less of a straight-line and more convoluted.

accepted. All because of love for you, you who feared yourself un-lovely.⁸

Be astonished! Be wonder-full! And so, thankful.

VI

You're knocked down at his feet. You don't need anything else. He's already done so much mercy.

But he says, "Get up. Rise up. Resurrect up." You were road-kill, going nowhere. He gets you up.

He says, "Get going."

Going? Where? You were going nowhere. You had, literally, no where to go.

Now! Where?

You're Samaritan. You're going to go back.

Home. Her! Them! Here.

With Him! Thank you!

Amen.

⁸ I've used phrases that echo the description of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52-53.