

## Character: Leper

October 9, 2016

### Luke 17: 11-19:

*11 On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus went along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men with leprosy came toward him. They stood at a distance 13 and shouted, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 Jesus looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." On their way they were healed. 15 When one of them discovered that he was healed, he came back, shouting praises to God. 16 He bowed down at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was from the country of Samaria. 17 Jesus asked, "Weren't ten men healed? Where are the other nine? 18 Why was this foreigner the only one who came back to thank God?" 19 Then Jesus told the man, "You may get up and go. Your faith has made you well."*



Today we begin the "Character" series, a new series where we will look at some characters from the Gospel of Luke. These characters each bring a perspective that will help us to

become individuals and a church that seek to live into our mission as disciples of Christ. Last week I shared the vision statement of the Dakotas Methodist

Conference. It reads, "For every congregation to become a vital expression of the scriptural imperative to grow in love of God and neighbor, reach new people, and heal a broken world." Over the course of these four weeks, we will look at

the leper, the persistent widow, the Pharisee and tax collector, and at Zacchaeus as means to live into this vision, both as individuals and as a congregation. Let us pray.

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As we wrestle with today's parable, we will look at three key aspects of this parable of the lepers. First, we begin by looking at where we fit in this story. At first glance, we are all like the ten lepers in that we most often cry out to Jesus when we are in crisis or in a struggle in life. When we are having a hard time in life, when we are in the valley, that is when we seek Jesus and when we too cry out, "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us!*" It is when we hurt, when we are dealing with something in life, it is then that we cry out to Jesus. Just like the ten lepers, we want Jesus to bring us healing, to make us well. Our response to the times that Jesus does make us well is where we differ. Our response to what Jesus has done in our life can vary greatly. Our key question here is: Are we more often like the one who came back to praise God or are we more often like the nine who did not return to give thanks? If you are like me, the answer is 'both'.

Sometimes, when Jesus has responded to my pleas, I am like the one. I come to Jesus and offer up my prayers of thanksgiving and praise for what Jesus has done in my life. I might even seek to follow Jesus a little more closely as my grateful response, maybe seeking to love God and neighbor a bit more than I had been. It is when we experience Jesus' healing that we begin to sense a desire to bring this same healing to our broken world.



*On the day I arrived to visit, I saw a touching scene. This man had a young son, and during his confinement in the hospital, he had made a little wooden truck for his boy.*

*Since the boy was not allowed to go into the ward and visit his father, an orderly had brought the gift down to the child, who was waiting in front of the hospital with his mother. The father was looking out of a fifth-floor window, watching his son unwrap the gift.*

*The little boy opened the package, and his eyes got wide when he saw that wonderful little truck. He hugged it to his chest. Meanwhile, the father was walking back and forth waving his arms behind the windowpane, trying to get his son's attention.*

*The little boy put the truck down and reached up and hugged the orderly and thanked him for the truck. And all the while the frustrated father was going through these dramatic gestures, trying to say, "It's me, son. I made the truck for you. I gave that to you. Look up here!" I could almost read his lips.*

*Finally the mother and the orderly turned the boy's attention up to that fifth-floor window. It was then the boy cried, "Daddy! Thank you! I miss you, Daddy! Come home, Daddy. Thank you for my truck." And the father stood in the window with tears pouring down his cheeks. How much like that child we are.*

It is true that sometimes we are like the child for most of this story. Sometimes we are so grateful for Jesus' gift, for His healing touch, but we neglect to look up, to offer our thanks to Jesus. And it is not hard to imagine Jesus, off in the distance, waving His arms, trying to bring our attention back to Him, trying to draw us into following Him as a faithful disciple. Yes, sadly we are sometimes like the nine. Sometimes we are so grateful to be past our struggle, so happy to be back to our normal life, that we simply forget to say thanks. We go on with life. We do not stop to offer our praise, our thanksgiving, ourselves.



We now turn to the second key aspect of this parable: who is the leper today? This could mean when are we the leper and it could mean who are the lepers in our community? We don't like to think of ourselves as lepers. We don't like to think of ourselves as outcasts or as being separated, but we are at times. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, lepers were required to live away from the community, to keep isolated so that their disease did not infect others. So they lived in colonies outside of the villages and larger communities. For these ten lepers in our parable today, it would have been months or perhaps years since they had seen family or friends up close. Months or years of isolation. No hope of ending this isolation. No hope of a cure. It was simply how it was.



At times we wander from our faith. At times we fall to temptation and we live in sin for a period. Maybe it is for a short time but maybe it is for a season. Our guilt keeps us separated from God and our church family. Maybe it even keeps us separated from our own family. While we are living with our sin, we cannot bring ourselves into God's presence so we stay away from church, we do not read our Bibles, we do not pray. Because of our sin, we feel unworthy to be in God's presence. We are like the lepers. We cannot break sin's grip and we stay isolated. But Jesus is always there, on the edge, waving His arms, trying to get our attention. All we have to do is turn back, repent, and enter His grace.

In terms of looking at our vision as a Methodist congregation in the Dakotas conference, who is it in our community that are the lepers, those who need to find healing? Who is it in our community that needs to come to know Jesus' love and mercy? It is those who are like we are when we are the leper. It is those struggling with addiction. It is those struggling with depression or anxiety or any other number of mental issues. It is those struggling to provide food and clothes and shelter for themselves or their family. It is those who cannot break wealth's grip on their life. It is those who seek popularity and acceptance through any means possible. It is those who are searching for meaning and purpose but cannot find it in any of the many idols that they chase. It is all those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is to these that we are called.



Lastly, we turn to the times in our lives when we have been like the ten lepers, to times when we have experienced Jesus's healing in our lives. Go back with me to a time when you were the leper, when you were separated from God.

Your choices and decisions had led you to a place where your sin had separated you from God. Remember what it felt like to be unworthy of being in God's presence? Or maybe it was a circumstance beyond your control. Maybe it was an illness or a job loss or an unexpected death that made God feel distant. It was a time when you so desperately needed God's touch or presence and God just did not seem to be there. There are many reasons we can feel isolated and separated from God. Can you remember what it felt like to be distant or separated from God?

Now, remember what it felt like to be drawn back into relationship with God, back into Jesus' presence. Remember what it felt like to experience Jesus' forgiveness, to feel that grace or healing wash over you, to know that you were again made right with God. Remember what it felt like to be healed spiritually or emotionally or physically? Remember the power of Jesus that you felt in your life at that moment? Remember the impact it had on your faith? This is part of your faith story, this is part of your relationship with Jesus, this is part of who you are. This is what Jesus calls us to share with the world. The experience of Jesus in your life is the story that the lepers in our community need to hear. It is hope. It is purpose. It is acceptance. It is love. It is healing.

[Play "Chairs" video.]



The chairs are our pews. Someone here is like the friend in Y14, someone who is struggling with addiction. Someone here is like the couple in R14 and R15, someone who is struggling in their marriage. Someone here is like the single mom in H29, someone who so wants to hear hope. Someone here is like the apathetic teenager in G22, someone whose friend in H19 is praying for them every single day. For each of us here today, we who are like one in the video, we also need to find hope or purpose or acceptance or love or healing. Like the couple in Q9 and 10 whose lives and story rescued the almost divorced couple in R14 and 15, like the Youth in H19 who prayed daily for their fellow teenager in G22, we too have experiences and stories that can bring healing and wholeness.

For each of these here today, there are dozens out there who also need hope or purpose or acceptance or love or healing. Remember what it felt like to be an outcast, to be a leper? Remember what it felt like when Jesus healed you spiritually or emotionally or physically? Remember the power of Jesus that you felt in your life at that moment? Remember the impact it had on your faith? This is part of your story. Claim your story. Like the one, we need to return and to thank Jesus for the healing He brings to our lives. This is our story.

We live in a world so in need of hope and purpose and acceptance and love and healing. All of this is found in a relationship with Jesus. This week, share your story. Tell another what Jesus has done for you. This week, invite another to church. Help them to come to know of Jesus' love, of the healing He offers to all who are broken, to all who are lost. Share with another the story of what Jesus does and can do for all who will enter into a relationship with Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Remember the story in the video, the story of the angry man who came to church, who was in tears by the end of the service because he finally realized what Jesus had done for him? Jesus offers all of us hope and purpose and acceptance and love and healing. May we each be the light and love of Jesus this week, shining brightly into the lives of so many that need to know Jesus. Tell the story of what Jesus has done for you. May it be so. Amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Are there times when you are more like the nine, those who did not thank God for their blessings? How can you become more like the one?
- 2) When you have been a 'leper', how has God drawn you back into relationship? How can your experience help others to be in relationship with God?
- 3) What is your story of what Jesus does and has done in your life? How would you share this story with someone who did not know Jesus?
- 4) Who do you know that sits in pew G17 that has a struggle? Who do you know that needs to be sitting in M4? Pray for them both.