

Luke 17:11-19, Thanksgiving Sunday

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

The only problem with this passage for most preachers is to not wag our fingers at the ungrateful 90%. The other problem will be to not smugly count ourselves among the righteous 10%.

As usual with Biblical stories, it is important not to get distracted by the special effects. How the 10 are made clean is simply not explained in the text, and should not be explained - or explained away - in the sermon. As usual, the crucial element of the story is the **relationships** between Jesus and the others in the story. Focus on the interactions between Jesus and the lepers.

There are some interesting parallels in this short passage.

It starts with Jesus "on the way," the lepers are made clean "as they went," and both of Jesus' instructions to the lepers (first the 10, then the one) are "Go and ..." This is a passage about action; about transformation that happens on the way; and results in being sent.

It is a bit of a stretch but there is a tiny parallel between Jesus being on his way to Jerusalem - where he will see the priests - and his sending the lepers to see the priests. He sends them to see the priests in order that they might be officially found to be free of disease - to be clean - and thereby also officially allowed to re-join their families and towns - to be redeemed. Is there a parallel between how we become saved by Jesus' death and resurrection?

Notice that in verse 14, "they were made clean," and in verse 19, "your faith has made you well." In verse 14, the 10 are passive recipients - something is done to them by someone else - they are made clean. "Clean" is a socially defined status that can only be given by properly observed social and religious ritual. "Clean" is not something one can achieve by one's own means. That is why Jesus sends the 10 to show themselves to the priests.

However, as is often the case with healing stories, it is the person's faith / trust that makes them "well." Since we often use "faith" to mean "intellectual agreement," it is probably better to say, "Your trust (in God) has made you well." "Wellness" means physical well-being and safety.

Notice that the one who returns **praises** God and **thanks** Jesus. Praise and thanks are similar but not the same.

And finally, there is the startling revelation that the one who returned was a Samaritan. Samaritans were distant cousins of Galileans and Judeans. But ancient times they did not worship at Jerusalem and there was a civil war between them in the north and the Judeans in the South. At the time of Jesus, Samaritans were despised by Judeans. Should we presume from the story that the other 9 were Galileans or Judeans? That is, "members in good standing of the house of Israel" who therefore ought to have shown their good standing by also returning to give thanks?

One wonders why a Samaritan would head off to see a priest in the first place, since there is no way a priest would have anything to do with a Samaritan, and vice versa. Could be as soon as they were out of sight, he split from the other 9 while they did as they were told and went to see the priests.

In any case, Luke seems to have a thing for making Samaritans the good guys. (See the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37, which is told only in Luke.) This might have something to do with Luke being a Gentile - i.e., not of the house of Israel. For sure, it would be dead wrong to preach that the "moral of the story" is those ungrateful Jews, since for Jesus the issue never ever is which race or clan or status one has; but always is about trusting God. That is the "moral" of the story.

David Ewart,
www.davidewart.ca