



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

## “God Has Mercy on the Just and the Unjust”

Luke 17:11-19; Matthew 5:43-48

Each month when we gather for the ministry of healing, we read a story of healing from the Bible, and learn more about God’s healing. We’ll do the same tonight. Please open your Bibles to Luke’s gospel story of Jesus, chapter 17, verses 11-19. I’ll read from the New International Version. ***O God, speak to Your people through Your Word, to give the food each one needs, for healing and strength in Your ministries.***

Now, listen with me for God’s Word TO US TONIGHT, as I read these words aloud.  
[text]

One of the many things we notice in the healing stories of Jesus: the gospel language is very simple and short. There are no long descriptions of Jesus’ dress, no long incantations of the spirits, seldom any ancillary activity at all. This is very restrained, compared with some other accounts of healers from that time. And we have it again, tonight.

And as for this particular incident, I think this is the largest miracle in the gospels. Not one, not two, but fully ten men are healed of their leprosy.

With what the Bible text calls leprosy, there are some other things to notice. The Hebrew book of Leviticus in chapters 13 and 14 has regulations about leprosy—a condition today we probably know as Psoriasis (flaky skin that can become raw sores, and very contagious); it’s not the leprosy we call Hansen’s Disease. The regulations in Leviticus say that several skin conditions require an examination by a priest, who is to act as a physician and give a screening exam. The regulations are very specific and detailed. If what they called leprosy is found, then here’s what is to happen, according to Leviticus 13:45 and 46: <sup>45</sup> The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” <sup>46</sup> He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (NRSV)

Can you imagine that kind of life? It’s not nearly as supportive as the old tuberculosis sanitariums that sprang up all around our country before antibiotics and public health measures became common. Some of those were sometimes like our modern “spas”, located ‘way out in the country away from other people. Most, however, had long wards full of hospital beds, and masked attendants. No, in Bible times, living “outside the camp” in deliberately-torn clothes, or rags, without bathing (so as not to contaminate water others might use), was pretty miserable. And no healthy member of Israel could approach them. Later, they would carry little bells, which they would ring as a warning so that no one on the road would accidentally bump into them, and have to risk contracting the disease, and going through an elaborate purification ritual just in case. And without knowing much about the underlying disease process, people could be banished for their whole lives, lest they contaminate the camp.

But these ten have sought out Jesus, and though they hang back as they should, instead of warning people away, they call out to Jesus for help. They have heard that Jesus heals. They want what he might give them. That's faith, isn't it?

Again, there's not a word about anything Jesus did. He simply says, "Go back to the examining priests, the ones who can clear you to return to normal life." And they head out. Now, at the start of their trips, they are not healed. There is no sign anything has changed. But they obey Jesus, and "as they go", the text says, they were healed. We can assume the priests saw that, for none return, except one.

There's the interesting twist. Maybe the spotlight is not really on the healing at all; instead, it's on the response of just ONE of these ten now-healed-lepers. ONE makes the trip back to Jesus, to thank him with such unselfconsciousness that he falls at Jesus' feet—a posture of worship—right in front of everyone. And then Luke adds another detail. This guy, and none of the others, was a Samaritan. None of the Jews came to thank Jesus, but only this reputed half-breed, mongrelized and religiously-suspicious Samaritan.

Jesus notices. But what does he say and do? He's surprised only one has returned—the foreigner who might be exempt from the Hebrew health regulations. Jesus tells him, "Your faith has made you well."

Isn't that interesting? In a way, all 10 had faith, didn't they? They had put themselves under the regulations God had given in the Torah, the Law of Moses. And they all had faith to come to Jesus for healing. So how is THIS ONE man's "faith" different from the others'? What do you think?

It's a faith that drives for a response, changes one's agenda; it's a faith that brings one to Jesus. It's "full faith". Because this one man has responded and returned to Jesus—and thereby proved he "gets it"—his faith is full faith, indeed. He is healthier than any of the others; he has received a spiritual healing, in addition to the physical healing. That's what it takes for any of us to be "really well".

Does that mean that Jesus rescinded the healing of the other nine guys, because they didn't recognize the presence of God in this healing? Probably not. Because God is not like that. He almost never takes back a blessing He has given, even when people do not respond, even when they take him for granted, or even if they de-value God. God wants to bless, and God is generous, generous with all kinds of people, faithful or not.

In his "Sermon on the Mount" section beginning in Matthew 5:43, Jesus said,<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?<sup>48</sup> Be perfect—the word means, "grown up", or "mature"—be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (NIV)

This proves the generosity of God, doesn't it? God doesn't make full faith a requirement of His blessing. And he asks—no, he commands—that we do the same. Which means that we, also, will be taken for granted, disrespected, ignored.

Now, we could look at that as a hurt. But consider: if we bless without requiring or depending upon the other person's response, then we are free. We are no longer controlled by how grateful or ungrateful the receiver appears. Kinda like God.

Do you carry some social disease that puts you "outside the camp"? Do you know someone who is "outside the camp" because they do not conform to some social expectation or religious rule? How might you be generous with them? How might you be part of God's healing, that restores them to walk "among the living"?

**Communion:** The Lord's Table reminds us that we were "outside the camp"—or it should! Jesus was celebrating the Passover, and all who were present were Jews. They had the heritage of slavery and liberation; it was woven into their culture. Most of us are not Jewish by ancestry or conviction. How is it that we get to be included? We did not deserve it. It was God's generous offer of salvation to any and all in Jesus that makes room for us to sit with Jesus at all. Like the lepers, we can come close to Jesus. Like the Samaritans, we can come close to Jesus. So as we join with Jesus tonight in His Supper, let our hearts be glad and grateful that God is so generous that He welcomes even us, to be part of His Forever Family.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on February 16, 2007's Healing Service, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]