



Auburn Presbyterian Church

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

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“What Wond’rous Love!”

Leviticus 14:1-32; Luke 17:11-19

Dedicate Teachers; Bibles for Children

Healing Ministry

Today is another “second Sunday”, when we offer the ministry of Jesus for healing. You may have heard about the three nurses died and went to Heaven, where they were met at the Pearly Gates by St. Peter. To the first, he asked, "So, what did you used to do back on Earth? Why do you think you should be allowed to come into Heaven?" "I was a nurse at an inner city hospital," she replied. "I worked to bring healing and peace to many sufferers, especially poor, helpless children." "Very noble," said St. Peter. "You may enter." And in through the Gates she went. To the next, he asked the same question, "So, what did you used to do?" "I was a nurse at a missionary hospital in the Amazon basin," she replied. "For many years, I worked with a skeleton crew of doctors and nurses who tried to reach out to as many people across numerous tribes, with a hand of healing and peace, and with the message about God's love." "How touching," said St. Peter. "You, too, may enter." And in she went. He then came to the last nurse, to whom he asked, "So, what did you used to do back on Earth?" After some hesitation, she explained, "I was just a nurse at an HMO." St. Peter pondered this for a moment, and then said, "Okay, you may enter, too." "Whew!" said the nurse. "For a moment there, I thought you weren't going to let me in." "Oh, you can come in," said St. Peter, "but you can only stay for three days."

You may notice that I often pick a “healing” text on these Sundays, and today is no exception. I hope that through our study of this text, and listening for God’s voice, we might grow in our awe of God, and be drawn closer to Jesus. Open your Bibles to Luke’s gospel, chapter 17, and find verse 11. Jesus is well into his three-year ministry at this point. He is in the middle of a long teaching session, if all these parts were spoken at the same time. Let’s focus today on the account of ten men whom Jesus healed from leprosy. I’ll read the text, and then we’ll explore it together, and draw out what God might be saying to you and me today. *Holy Spirit, come and teach us this morning!* Listen for the Word of God. *[text]*

What stands out to you? Jesus is on the border between Samaria and Galilee. Ten men are standing together as he passes by, standing at a distance off the road, as required by the Jewish Law. Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 carry these regulations.

All these men called out together in a loud voice, or perhaps called together in all their voices, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

Jesus stops. He looks. There’s no mistaking the condition these guys are carrying—their clothes and behavior tells the story so well that Jesus doesn’t have to examine them at all.

“Go show yourselves to the priests.” Priests are at the Jerusalem Temple, not out there in the country. These men are going to walk a long way to get to Jerusalem. As they go, they are healed.

Jesus doesn't seem to do anything. Jesus this time heals at a distance; he does not touch these lepers as he does at other times. Isn't that interesting? I guess Jesus' healing is not a magic “formula”; Luke writes no words describing the healer—special gestures, incantations, medicine man stuff. What we get in Jesus is a free expression of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. The healing itself is hardly mentioned—and Jesus does not think it remarkable.

We don't actually see the healing at all. But by instructing them to go to be inspected by the priests, these poor men understand the trip is commanded because healing is somehow going to occur. And because it's Jesus who gives this order, they obey. And because they obey, they are healed. They had faith that Jesus would somehow heal them, or they would have stared at him in disbelief when he told them to go see the priests. Without hesitation, they set out to get their healing officially certified, just one of the steps on the way to being restored to their families, which will include further cleansing rituals and sacrifices at the Temple to thank God for the healing they've received. If you read in Leviticus 14 about the sacrifices required—and there are two sets of instructions, one for rich people and one for poor people—you'll notice some of the offerings are labeled as “guilt offerings”. Bible people often reckoned sickness as a sign of sin, often as God's punishment for sin. Jesus separated sickness and sin; both need healing, but one is not necessarily connected with the other. Sometimes people label “sin” things that just make us fearful.

One of these ten lepers—let's call him, ‘Bob’—is on his way, and sees his healing happen “on the go”. He stops. He is overcome with awe and wonder. The other nine are going on uphill to Jerusalem, but Bob turns around, and makes his way back downhill to where Jesus was. He throws himself down at Jesus' feet, a posture of worship, and thanks him profusely. And as it turns out, Bob is from Samaria, whose people Jews actively shunned and cursed as half-breeds. There's a specific history there, dating to 450 years before Jesus; but I'll save that for another time.

Where did the other nine go? They are doing what Jesus told them to do. They are on their way to Jerusalem to complete the requirements of the Jewish law. (Jesus shows himself here to be very “orthodox”, something we often forget to notice, with all the conflict Jesus has with the religious authorities.) Though these nine seem to be unfaithful, they had more faith in Jesus than most of the self-righteous Pharisees, like the one called Nicodemus in John, chapter 3. They were always insisting that only what their eyes could see and their fingers could feel was real. But more than the other nine lepers who got healed, only our Bob wanted a relationship with the Healer. The one who “came to Jesus” before he completed the required sacrifices was declared “saved by his faith”. The other nine were simply given “a clean bill of health” by the priest. All 10 believed Jesus could heal.

In the Bible, the Greek word for “health” is the same as the word for “salvation”—*salus*. Only one “got it” that Jesus was also the Lord, the Promised One. Only one “got Jesus”. That one got healing from leprosy AND healing of his relationship with God, which is salvation.

Warren Wiersbe, eager to preserve the primacy of faith, wrote, “No, our salvation does not depend on gratitude.... Our salvation does not depend on what we do *after* Christ has spoken forgiveness to us.” But as we evangelical Christians have emphasized “the sovereignty of God”

and “salvation by grace through faith alone” (and not works), we have created a new distortion of the faith of Jesus. Dallas Willard quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his prison cell toward the end of World War Two: a sole emphasis on faith alone can become what he called, “cheap grace”. Cheap grace trivializes the death of Jesus for our sin, if all it means is a tip of the hat in Jesus’ direction. (Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989; adapted); Dallas Willard: *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006) How sad and shrunken the life lived, “saved without the Saver”! If we **SEEK the relationship**, if we “come joyfully to Jesus”, we come to be willing disciples, offering our lives as (ongoing) “living sacrifices” (if I understand Paul’s words in Romans 12); we become “gifts that keep on giving”.

We’ll never know about the other nine. One man named Charles Brown gave several suggestions as to why the other nine never returned to give thanks. Keep in mind that these are only suggestions, but they reveal a whole lot about human nature:

- One waited to see if the cure was real.
- One waited to see if it would last.
- One said he would see Jesus later.
- One decided that he had never had leprosy.
- One said he would have gotten well anyway.
- One gave the glory to the priests.
- One said, "O, well, Jesus didn't really do anything."
- One said, "Any rabbi could have done it."
- One said, "I was already much improved." All these nine left Jesus behind, as far as we know. How sad—taking the gift, and ignoring the Giver! How sad--for them! The Nine were “consumers”; only our “Bob”--the Samaritan who no Jew would think was worth Jesus’ time--was “connecting with Christ”. Isn’t continuing gratitude an expression of sincere faith?

What about us? Many of us have received wonderful gifts from God. Are we “consumers” or are we “Christ followers”? Is our connection with Christ only “skin deep”? Are we living with an attitude of gratitude, or living self-centered, “entitled” lives?

Jesus healed them ALL. What wond'rous love! God reaches out to people while they are sick with sin—people like me, people like you. Healing happens when we come to Jesus, and life transformation happens when we “remain in Jesus” (as John’s gospel remembers).

Are you ready to be healed? “Do you want to get well?” Jesus asked of the man at the Bethesda/Bethsaida pool in John 5:6. You can come for physical healing, healing of past memories, healing of a broken relationship with God, or you can come for the healing of another. Our Ministry Team staff will be glad to give you the healing God wants you to have. In gratitude, “come to Jesus”.

(After our last song and God’s words of blessing, we’ll ask all who are praying through the healing ministry to move to the center section, with all who wish to come for healing ministry. The rest, please move out quickly and quietly, so that our ministry session can begin. You can also return with your coffee and goodies to support us in prayer.) Come to Jesus.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on September 14, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]