

Praise After the Fire

“Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious!” (Psalm 66:1-2). Psalm 66 begins with an explosion of praise – but it comes after hardship. By the time we reach verse 12, the psalmist testifies, “You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance.” In other words, the people of God had been refined, tested, and stretched – but God was faithful through it all. Their suffering became the soil in which their gratitude grew.

That’s a good background for our Gospel lesson today. There too, we find people who have suffered – ten men marked by disease and loneliness. Isolation. They cry out for mercy – and Jesus answers. Yet only one returns to give thanks.

Through the story, Jesus shows us what it means for us to have “Whole Faith” – faith that not only seeks healing but returns to the Healer. Faith that not only receives mercy, but responds naturally with worship. If you have your Bible or Bible app handy, turn with me to our Gospel lesson found in Luke 17:11-19. **Read Luke 17:11-19.**

On the Way to Jerusalem

Luke, the writer of this Gospel and the Book of Acts, is a fascinating person. He was a Gentile, and a doctor, and wrote the accounts to a wealthy patron named Theophilus, who Bible scholars seem to think was a Roman official. In our Gospel lesson for this morning, Luke reminds us that Jesus is on a sacred journey. He writes, “Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee,” (Luke 17:11).

Jesus isn’t rambling along through the countryside for a Sunday afternoon drive. He’s got a purpose. He’s heading toward Jerusalem. What happens to Jesus in Jerusalem, friends? It’s the place where He faces betrayal, crucifixion, death – and ultimately resurrection.

Even on the way to His own suffering, Jesus takes time to deal with the suffering of others. This is the heart of our Savior – He’s compassionate, even while carrying the weight of the cross. Notice, too, that He travels “along the border between Samaria and Galilee.” This boundary region represents division and difference. On the one side is Jewish territory, while the other is Samaritan.

In the Gospels, Jesus is always found in the in-between places. On the pages of Holy Scripture we see Him bring grace where the world draws lines and sides. That’s where He still meets us today. He meets us at the borders of belonging, where we feel caught between rejection and redemption.

The Ten Lepers

Here’s what Luke tells us next. “As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance,” (verse 12). This is really important.

Leprosy in those days wasn't just a disease. It was a death sentence for your social and spiritual life.

Lepers were excluded from their own families. They couldn't attend worship services. They couldn't even go to work. The Law required them to live apart, and cry out "Unclean!" wherever they went so other people would know to avoid them and stay away. (check out Lev. 13:45-46).

So when these ten men stand "at a distance," it's not just an issue of physical space. It's also symbolic of everything sin and suffering do to us. They separate us from others and from God. But here's the hope – even from a distance, they can still cry out to Jesus. That's all it takes. Friends, there may be someone in here, or someone watching online – you might feel far from God today, but distance doesn't stop His mercy!

Lord, Have Mercy!

"They called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'" (Luke 17:13). Their cry is desperate and faithful. They call Him "Master" – a title of respect used in Luke's Gospel by Jesus' followers. Somehow, even in their exile and isolation, they are able to recognize Jesus' authority.

The lepers really have a simple prayer. "Have pity on us!" There's no long speech. No ritual. It's just a cry for mercy. How often have you been where the lepers were? To the point of praying, "Lord, have mercy!" It's been turned into the sinner's prayer, right? "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

See friends, this is often where faith begins. It doesn't start with worthiness. It begins with dependence. The lepers ask for mercy because they believe Jesus is able to give it to them. There's nothing here that suggests they think they deserve it, either. They recognize that if He gives it, it's a free, undeserved gift from Him.

Faith Acts Before Evidence Appears

Pay careful attention to what happens next in the story. "When Jesus saw them, He said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed," (verse 14). Jesus doesn't walk up and touch them. He doesn't ask them what they did to get into the mess they were in. He doesn't even say to them, "You are healed." Instead, He gives them a command that requires faith. "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

According to Leviticus 14:2-3, a healed leper had to be examined by a priest before they could rejoin society. And if they were healed, they had a lot of hoops to jump through before they could return to their homes. The first 32 verses of that chapter outline the requirements these guys in the Gospel lesson would have had to do to fully return to society. So Jesus' instruction to them assumes the healing will take place – but not yet.

They're in an in-between time. Notice the sequence here. They are not healed before they go. They are healed as they go. Faith acts before the evidence appears. Sometimes God asks us to move while our skin is still raw. While our pain is still

present. While our future is still uncertain. But as we step out in obedience, healing happens on the journey. The miracles God works today are like this. His miracles often meet us when we are in motion!

One Came Back

“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice,” (Luke 17:15), Luke tells us next. All ten were cleansed. But only one of them saw it and turned back. Gratitude begins with awareness. How often do we miss what God has done in our lives simply because we don’t stop to see it?

This leper didn’t just notice his healing – he celebrated it. His praise is loud, public, and unashamed. The voice that once cried for mercy now cries out in praise and worship. When God delivers us, the volume of our praise should match the depth of our deliverance.

Can you imagine what our worship experiences as the Church would be like, if we worshiped that way? Loudly celebrating the great things God has done for us? Although, and this is a really sad thought, maybe some people don’t think God’s really done all that much for them. Here in a few minutes we’re going to sing a song together, and I hope you give Him some real praise for the great things He’s done for us! He gave us Jesus to cleanse us from sin, and deliver us from death – but I’m jumping ahead of myself!

Threw Himself At Jesus’ Feet

Look at what this one leper did when he returned. We’re told, “He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him – and he was a Samaritan,” (verse 16). This really is the high point of the story. The one who returns isn’t Jewish. He’s Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans despised each other. They worshiped separately, lived separately, avoided each other.

Yet the remarkable thing here is that the outsider is the one who models true faith. And he doesn’t just say “Thank you,” when he returns. We’re told he throws himself at Jesus’ feet in worship. Gratitude becomes adoration. Healing leads to holiness.

This particular verse, about the man throwing himself at Jesus’ feet and worshiping reminds me of another story found in the Gospel (Luke 7:36-50). Remember the time Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to a dinner party, and the sinful woman of the town – now friends, that’s politically correct terminology of the time for a prostitute – anyhow, she found out Jesus was there, and she came in and wept at His feet? The woman washed His feet with her tears, she kissed them, dried them with her hair, and then pours expensive perfume on them. And the Pharisee, all he can think is, “If Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman she is.”

So Jesus teaches him about grace and hospitality, and then tells the woman her sins have been forgiven, her faith has saved her, and to go in peace. This Samaritan leper who has been healed by Jesus reminds me so much of the prostitute – worshiping at the feet of Jesus. Sometimes the people we least expect to understand

God's grace are the ones who grasp it most deeply. In both cases, the Samaritan leper and the prostitute, they knew what it was like to be excluded. When you know what it's like being excluded, you treasure being included all the more!

Ingratitude is Forgetfulness

Look at how Jesus initially responds to what the Samaritan leper does. "Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?' (Lk. 17:17). He asks two haunting questions here: "Weren't all ten healed?" And "Where are the other nine?" It makes us wonder – and I suppose the Church has wondered down through the centuries – Why did only one come back?

To be sure, the nine did nothing wrong. The bottom line is they were simply preoccupied. They had families to see. Priests to visit. Lives to rebuild. But in their rush to resume life, they forgot the One who gave them life.

How often do we do that, church? We pray desperately for help, and when God answers, we move on. Perhaps we move on with relief, "Aaahhh, God answered my prayer," but is that worship? I don't think so – at least not in the way the Samaritan leper worships at the feet of Jesus.

Ingratitude is not rebellion. It boils down to forgetfulness. And when we are forgetful, especially in regards to our praise and worship, it damages us. It robs us of a deepening relationship with God. It would be like getting married, going on your honeymoon, and then forgetting your anniversary year after year. That goes over like a lead balloon!

God Delights in Thankful Hearts

Jesus asks a third question in our passage, "Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" (verse 18). The Samaritan – the outsider – is the only one who returns to give thanks. Jesus calls his act "praise to God." When we thank Jesus for what He's done, we glorify the Father. Let me clarify that – when we praise and worship Jesus for what He has done, that glorifies God the Father.

Jesus tells us in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one," and Paul tells us in Colossians 1:15, "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation." When we praise and worship Jesus, we are praising and worshiping God. And gratitude isn't just good manners. The leper doesn't walk up to Him and say, "Oh, thank You Jesus." He's loud about it – the Amplified Bible says he falls prostrate on the ground at the feet of Jesus and praises God. It's a bold, public expression of worship and praise.

In the Kingdom of God, it's not going to be our backgrounds, our nationalities, or I daresay even our religion that defines us. It's going to be our response to the grace of God poured out on us from the cross of Jesus Christ. If we receive it freely as a gift, and let His Spirit come in and take up residence on the throne of our hearts, we'll be fine. But if not – well, I hope none of us will fit into that group that treats grace as a cheap disposable item. The Lord delights in thankful, grateful hearts – wherever they're found.

Whole Faith

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well,’” (Lk. 17:19). The Greek word that translates as “made you well,” is *sozo*. It means “to save,” “to deliver,” or “to make whole.” Ten lepers were healed physically that day on the border of Galilee and Samaria. But only one was healed completely.

Healing restored the body, and faith restored the soul. That’s whole faith – faith that doesn’t just receive God’s gifts, but also enters into a relationship with the Giver. The Samaritan leper’s body was healed on the road. But his heart was healed at the feet of Jesus.

There are a few takeaways for us this morning. First, whole faith is grateful faith. It doesn’t take blessings for granted – it turns blessings into praise. Gratitude is our doorway to wholeness. It shifts our focus from what we’ve lost to what God has done. When we live gratefully, our hearts stay open to the on-going work of God.

Whole faith is obedient. The ten were cleansed, “as they went.” Their obedience unlocked their healing. Whole faith moves when Jesus speaks – even before the evidence appears. Obedience isn’t always glamorous, but it’s always powerful! Each step taken in faith – however small – becomes a step toward healing.

Whole faith is worshipful. The Samaritan leper’s gratitude turned into worship. He didn’t just thank Jesus – the man fell at Jesus’ feet. Whole faith doesn’t just appreciate the gifts God gives to us, rather, it adores His presence with us throughout life. And worship is what happens when gratitude finds its voice.

Whole faith is also transformative. The nine received restoration of health. The one, in addition to receiving his health back, also received restoration of his heart. Whole faith won’t stop at being “better,” or “better than.” It continuously presses on to become the new creation. When gratitude takes root deep in our hearts, we’re transformed. We go from being healed to being whole, from cleansed to saved, from recipients of mercy to carriers – bearers – of God’s grace.

Are You Whole Today?

Our Old Testament lesson, Psalm 66, mirrors the Samaritan’s journey. God’s people walked through “fire and water,” just like the lepers walked through affliction and exclusion. But the psalmist rejoices, “Come and see what God has done, His awesome deeds for mankind!” (Ps. 66:5). Both the psalmist and the Samaritan leper shout praise not because life was easy for them, it wasn’t – but because God was faithful! True faith celebrates God’s character.

Are you whole today? A lot of people come to Jesus for healing. But fewer come back for wholeness. It’s one thing to ask for mercy. It’s a horse of a different color to live in gratitude. Jesus’ question continues to ring across the ages, “Where are the nine?”

Will we be among the nine who take the blessing and move on – or among the one who turns back the blessing into praise? Whole faith sees God’s mercy displayed through the cross. It obeys His word, returns in gratitude, and worships at the feet of Jesus. When you do that, you don’t just get healed – you’re made whole!

Prayer: Merciful Lord, Thank You for Your unfailing love and Your power to heal and restore. When we cry out for mercy, You hear us. When we walk in obedience, You meet us with grace. Teach us to be like the one who turned back – to live with hearts filled with gratitude, to worship with voices that proclaim Your goodness, and to walk in the wholeness of faith that trusts You completely. Make us whole Lord – in body, mind, and spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.