

## Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

Service - Luke 17:11-19

<sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup> they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup> When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" <sup>18</sup> Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

In this story from the life of Jesus there was an odd thing that struck me really for the first time as I read this. Look at verse 12, **As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance.** Keeping their distance. While the lepers wanted something from Jesus, they did not approach. Jesus was clean, they were dirty. Jesus was part of one part of society, they were from another. It would have been improper, not just improper but would have resulted in severe reprisal had they approached or touched Jesus.

While these men may have known Jesus had what they need or could have done something about their condition, they were conditioned themselves by society not to overstep their place.

St. Paul's exists to make disciples and our dream, our vision says we do that by, Sharing God's Love, Changing lives and Serving the Community. Serving the Community. But these three men of Jesus day, who knew that Jesus could help them were hesitant to come close. Is the community around us aware that help may exist for them here at St. Paul? If they are aware, are there fears that keep them from approaching? Are there fears on their part that keep them from approaching?

Now I know that I have not jumped to the end of the story about the one leper who returned to give thanks. Maybe I should have saved this one until closer to Thanksgiving. I trust you will remember the ending and the clear lesson about always returning to give thanks for what God does for us through another.

But since we are talking about service and what it is that Jesus did for these 10 lepers, I want you to notice that at least on this occasion, Jesus does not approach them or touch them. Jesus adheres to the customs of the community. And yet, in spite of the customs of the day, Jesus finds a way to touch these members of society. He sends them to the temple to be re-examined to see if leprosy is still within them.

You probably need to understand that the custom of the day declared if someone was thought to have leprosy or some other skin disease, they went to the temple for the priests to inspect them. If they had just discovered they may have disease, the spots would be marked and they would be re-examined in a week to see if the disease had spread or gone away. If it still existed they would be declared lepers and banished from the city. They would no longer be allowed any contact with other citizens who were not infected. Failure to declare you were a leper and stay clear of clean persons could result in being stoned to death.

If a person was thought to have been cured of leprosy then the process was just the same. They came to the priest to evaluate them. Finding them clear meant they returned in one week to be reevaluated and rechecked. If they were found clean for a second time they could be readmitted into society and their leprosy was said to have been cured.

Jesus sent 10 lepers to be checked for the first time. They might have returned after that and given thanks, but not really because they were not yet declared free from the disease. What it says is that they returned to their homes giving thanks. What that really means is that there was a process of their being declared free. The first occasion was that day, and the second was a week later when they would have been declared free. Jesus sets 10 men free from leprosy; it takes them at least a week for the culture to agree that they are free. Jesus continues his travels and talks and ministry of healing.

When the 10 are actually declared free and allowed to return to society, 9 hurry home to their lives and one makes the effort to seek Jesus out and give thanks.

Why I bring that up is not to make us think about returning and giving thanks for what God has done for us. I expect you to understand that as we learn of our own healing, as we find ourselves being declared whole and knowing it is true within our own lives, we most certainly should return to Christ and give thanks.

But we are the children of God. We need to practice giving thanks for our blessings of wholeness. But we are also called to be the children of God in the world. Brothers and sister of Jesus Christ, the only ones who may choose to carry on his tradition of serving the community.

There are hurting still need healing. But in light of what we see happening to Jesus, maybe we need to rethink our own idea of service. Do we serve to serve like Jesus or do we serve to be recognized?

Jesus healed 10 and one returned, that is 10% success rate if returning to give thanks is the goal. If healing of the 10 was the goal, there was a 100% success rate. Knowing what I know of Jesus, I feel certain that he would be accustomed to a 100% success rate.

If you and I the followers of Jesus choose to follow his example of service to the community, we need to get our motives for service. People may or may not return to give thanks. Some may resent our service or how it is done. Some may complain and suggest ways we could better serve. Some will even complain because we associate the name of Jesus with what we do. Even when everything goes just as planned we might not want to expect a great than 10% return if the goal involves something coming back to us or the church.

I find it hard to believe that Jesus healed 10 lepers so that just one would return to give thanks. I cannot imagine that Jesus touched the lives of 10 people just so that you and I might have some great lesson about God's love or about returning to give thanks. By the same token I cannot imagine Jesus turning away from 10 people who called out to him for help.

Why did Jesus help the 10 lepers? Because he could and they both needed and asked. Why should I help others? Whenever I am able and when they need and asked for my help.

Wayne Story was a member of my congregation in Orange Park. I know that he would not mind my using either his name or this story. Wayne has always been a gifted business man, understanding money and its use, credit and its use, as well as current wants and future needs. When his daughter, her husband and several of their friends' also church members began asking questions and seeking help, I contacted Wayne. Can you help? He certainly had the skill with over 30 years business experience and his lengthy time as someone who was debt free having paid off cars, credit cards and home so that when his children were grown and college was over he was also debt free.

He gathered some Crown ministries material, some information from Larry Burkett and found a time that both suited them and him. The resulting classes created a desire in many of the members in changing their financial habits and future. I would love to say they all remained in the church. But truth be told several members of the class having corrected their own financial habits decided their church was

not meeting all of their needs and moved on to other churches that reaped the benefits of their new habits including tithing.

But Wayne continued to teach the class because his goal was not just to help himself with their thanks or accolades nor was his goal to make better church members, although some really did. His goal was to help people with their financial difficulties. He had a 100% success rate. Everyone who came for short or long who did all the things suggested or only just corrected some things was better.

The goal of Jesus with the 10 lepers was that they would be healed. And they were. If St. Paul is to be a church who truly does serve the community, we need to be certain that we know our motives. Some may return to give us thanks. Some may ignore us even forgetting they were helped. But if we served them and they were helped to overcome whatever was alienating them we will have succeeded in the same way and at the same level as Jesus.

Why do you want to serve? Jesus success rate was 100% not 10%, because his purpose in serving was for the lepers to be healed. What is your goal in serving? If your goal is right like Jesus you can expect a 100% success rate. If you get something less, maybe your goal is wrong.

What do you expect in return? If your motives are as Jesus, you will be successful and people will be served and blessed.