

October 12, 2025
Lectionary 28, Year C
The 18th Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 17:11-19
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Thanks

I wonder what would have happened. I wonder what would have happened if the 10th healed leper, the only one who went back to thank Jesus had gone with the others and presented himself to the priests. I wonder what would have happened to this man, the one who, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back from his journey to the priests, and praised God, throwing himself down at Jesus' feet and giving thanks.

I wonder if he ever went to the priests, and if he did, what kind of response he would have gotten. You see, this man was a Samaritan. And Samaritans and Jews did not get along. They did not agree about where to worship. They did not agree about interpretation of scripture. For the most part, they ignored each other, even though they had shared history and shared bloodlines.

The Samaritans were from the nation of Israel, whose capital was Samaria. When the Assyrians destroyed Israel, they took most of the population into an exile from which they never returned. But before that, they were children of Israel, ten of the tribes of Israel, most of whom were lost to exile. The Assyrians moved other peoples into what had been the territory of the nation of Israel, and those people intermarried with the remaining Israelite population, becoming a hybrid race, called Samaritans. They worshiped God on Mount Gerizim and for the most part, Samaritans and Jews did not mix.

Which is why I wonder if the Samaritan leper really considered going to the Jewish priests, to be declared clean. Would he have been welcomed? Would they have been willing to declare him clean when it was more than just his skin disease, it was his blood, his identity itself, who he was, what he believed, where and how he worshiped, that proclaimed him to be an outcast, rejected by the very ones who should have announced him to be healed, to be clean. Would they have done it? Or would they have taken one look at this Samaritan man, with his newly healed skin, and still pronounced him to be anathema?

And what about the nine others; the nine other lepers who had lived with this man, joined together by nothing other than the disease that marred their skin and made them outcasts from the society around them. They had only each other, because no one wanted to be around them, to catch what they had, a disease that made their skin slough off, a kind of living death. Even when they approached Jesus, living, as they did, on the outskirts of the village, they kept their distance. They didn't want to be scolded for coming too close to the teacher. They didn't want to watch him recoil from them in horror, afraid that he might catch the disease that they carried. They didn't want to be rejected by him as they had been rejected by so many others, family, friends, neighbors, religious leaders.

But what would have happened once they all were healed? Would they have stood by each other? Would the nine who went happily running off to the priests to show them their healed, smooth, clean skin have still wanted to live in community with the one Samaritan among them? Would they have still welcomed him, still eaten with him, still shared a home with him?

Or would things have gone back to how they were before their broken bodies, their damaged skin, made them a community? Would they have rejected the Samaritan because they no longer had the horrible tie that had bound them together? Would they have told him that he no longer had a place with them? Would they have gone back to their families, their villages, their communities, their work, and left the Samaritan behind?

Did the Samaritan turn back to worship Jesus, because, anticipating the indifference of the priests to him, because he was a Samaritan, anticipating the rejection of his fellow former lepers, because he was a Samaritan and there was no more tie that bound them, he knew that there was no other place for him, no other community that would accept him, no other way for him to connect with God, except for Jesus. Jesus who had made him clean, whole, healed. Jesus who had mended his brokenness, who had given him new life. For him there was no one but Jesus.

I'm full of wondering this morning because I'm also wondering why we are here. Because we know for sure that there are many other places we could be. Many other communities that would accept us that are busy doing things this Sunday morning. Sports teams and band competitions and community clean ups and bike riding clubs and birthday parties and baby showers and the people getting ready for the football game and errands to run and chores to

catch up on or just a quiet morning with coffee and the newspaper—or more realistically scrolling through our phones, on what is for many of us the only morning that we have to ourselves.

We might even think that we've done something impressive, virtuous, heroic, by dragging ourselves out of bed, getting dressed, and getting ourselves and our families here this morning or even by following the link to zoom.

It used to be a norm, a given for so many people in our communities, that Sunday morning was for churchgoing. Society even made it easy for us, by making sure that Sunday morning was kept clear of other events, other opportunities, even stores were closed on Sunday mornings, or way back, all day on Sundays. But all that has changed and now we have so many choices and so much to cram into our busy and active lives, that it might feel like we're doing God a favor when we show up for worship on a Sunday morning—knowing that there are so many other places we could be, so many other things we could be doing.

We are not like that Samaritan, kneeling at the feet of Jesus, thanking Jesus. It's possible that he was only doing it because he had nowhere else to go.

Or maybe I'm selling the Samaritan short. Because when Jesus talks to him, he tells him to get up and go on his way, implying that the healed Samaritan did have somewhere to go. Maybe he did have some community waiting for him, waiting for his healed self to come home, to his village, to his family, to his work, to his life. Maybe he didn't need the Jewish priests to declare him clean because the Samaritan priests would do it for him. Maybe he too had a busy and full life that he was bursting to get back to.

But before he did any of that he stopped and he praised God and he thanked Jesus. Jesus, who was a Jew. A Jew who was on his way to Jerusalem. A Jew, who Samaritans did not interact with. A Jew, who had made him well, whole, clean, healed. A Jew who had saved him.

The Samaritan man stopped to kneel at Jesus' feet and say thank you. Because he was a Samaritan and Jesus was Jewish, he should have been the last one of the ten healed lepers to do it, but he was only to do it. He was the only one to recognize that before he did anything else, he needed to stop and praise God and thank Jesus for all that Jesus had done for him, for all of

the possibilities that seemed to open up for him in Jesus' presence and because of Jesus' healing word.

Today, we join the healed Samaritan man, not rushing off to a new life, to what's next in our lives. Not rushing off to our schedules or to do lists. Not rushing off to pile more onto to every precious minute of life, but gathering here, to stop for a moment, and praise God and give thanks to Jesus, for all that Jesus had done for us.

For all that we have comes from Jesus. Our time, our energy, our peace, our strength, our hope, our creativity, it all comes from God. And so, we gather, in the midst of it all, a moment of praise, a moment of rest, a moment of to say thank you. And it itself, this moment, this time, is a gift, even this time to worship is a gift, because it can help us put everything in perspective, it can help us to see and to know that no matter what this world throws at us, busyness, loneliness, sickness, health, sorrow, joy, Jesus is with us, speaking words of healing and hope, and all we can say is thanks. Amen.