

October 9, 2016

21C Pentecost

Rev Ken Wratten at St Stephen's in-the-Field

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Seek the welfare of the city where I have exiled you.

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, is my gospel.

Luke 17:11-19

Jesus heals 10 lepers, only one thanks him

Ten people with leprosy called to Jesus from a distance, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'. Leprosy is very contagious. People with leprosy, what we know today as Hansen's disease, suffer skin lesions, respiratory damage, and if left untreated, permanent damage to skin, nerves, limbs and eyes. In 1995 the World Health Organization reported that there were at that time between 2 and 3 million people infected with leprosy. Leprosy is now treatable. In biblical times, lepers were confined to leper colonies, away from their family and community. They were instructed to cry out, 'unclean, unclean' to warn person not to approach them. They were isolated, feared, and rejected.

The different response of the tenth leper in this Gospel reading is a study in the response to God intervening in OUR lives; God changing everything; the hand of God reaching out and touching US. It is a study for each of us to consider; do we have the eyes to see God at work in the world, and what do we do when we do see?

The tenth leper not only saw that he was healed, but he also recognized that the healing was the work of God that had been delivered through the ministry of Jesus. And the response from Jesus was that this tenth person with leprosy was not only healed, but he was blessed for his faith. Another way of translating the Greek for Jesus' words, "your faith has made you well" is "your faith has brought you salvation."

This one healed leper recognized the action of God in what happened; he turned back, praised God with a loud voice, prostrated himself at Jesus' feet, and thanked him. He could wait to show a priest that he was clean again; he could wait to be allowed back into his family and community. The most important thing for him was to acknowledge and thank the source of the miracle.

The result was for Jesus to pronounce a special blessing on him that the other nine did not receive. Ten were healed, but only one was transformed.

How intentional are you and I to see God at work when we are healed from sickness; or having conditions develop that lead to settling a long-standing disagreement; or for renewing a relationship with someone; or for building up the courage to ask someone for forgiveness over a mistake you have made; or just for getting through a hard day?

How are we like the nine lepers, in missing the blessing?

How many of us forget, or miss the chance in our busy day, to show God an attitude of gratitude?

The tenth leper is an example of living faithfully. Even though he was a foreigner (a Samaritan), even though he had lived for years as an outcast, he “saw” what had just happened to him, and he instantly stopped to praise God for being the power behind the miracle. He showed Jesus his attitude of gratitude.

For fourteen plus years, at the prayers of the people, when it is time for the bidding of Thanksgivings, I have offered the petition, ‘thank you God for this loving community.’ That has been my prayer of gratitude to God for making this a community of mutual respect, caring, concern, looking out for each other, being available to each other; without cliques, without hidden agendas; but with generosity and forgiveness and love for each other. I constantly see God at work here, through the way each of you cares for each other. How could we not be grateful to God for His blessing on us? How could we not give God praise for the amazing work He has been doing here for such a long time? How could we not recognize and acknowledge the blessings we have experienced here? Those blessings have transformed us into a very healthy and special faith family. Glory to God!

The short and simple story of ten lepers being healed is not such a simple story. It is a challenge for you and me to examine how our faith gets lived out. It is a reminder to check on how well we see God in our day – are the events in your day just chance, or luck, or nature – or are they God-incidents? And this story is an encouragement that once we recognize the source of what we see, we are not to forget to give God the glory. Gratitude is the outward sign of faith.

There were ten lepers; and nine of them were only healed. But one saw God at work, and was transformed to a life lived in gratitude. May you and I share in that blessing. Amen.