

The Space Beyond Healing

Luke 17: 11-19

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

Ten out of ten lepers are healed that day.

All ten of them shout out from the shadows, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

All ten of them are told to go to the priests—priests are like doctors who examine the sick and give them a clean bill of health once they are cured.

On their way to see the priests all ten experience the bumps on their skin becoming smooth.

The spots and blemishes vanish.

Nine out of ten go to the priests as Jesus told them to do.

But one turns around and goes back to Jesus to say thank you.

One out of ten. They aren't very good odds.

If the story is about being grateful, it makes me wonder:

Maybe one out of ten times I remember to say thank you to God.

Maybe 1/10th of the time I'm not totally taking life for granted.

Skim the top of the story and we notice it's about someone being grateful for a healing.

One out of ten.

Except, the story is about more than a healing. It's about who the healing happens to as well.

One out of ten returns to say thank you. Remember who the one is? Luke makes sure tell us it is a Samaritan. Oh, we know about Samaritans. The illegitimate "other" children of God. One of these things is not like "the other." Maybe the story is inviting us to see that even the "other" is faithful. Or maybe it's inviting us to remember a moment when we felt like the "other." My in-laws were in town this week. Over our morning coffee my father-in-law and I stumbled into a conversation about our privilege. We both could check off all the privilege boxes: white (check), male (check), straight, cis gender, educated (check, check, check). There isn't much that gets in the way of our day. But then he landed on a story about when he was a young boy growing up on the farm. His family, dirt poor. He stuck out at school and even at church as the poor kid from the poor farming family. His eyes teared up when remembering a time when he carried the label as the "other." Maybe Luke wants us to know the one who returns is the one who wears the "other" label. His gratitude flows out from more than just being healed, but for once in his life, not being treated as the "other."

But here's the puzzling thing: When the Samaritan returns to Jesus, wasn't the Samaritan already healed when Jesus tells him, "Your faith has made you well?" How can you be made well after you have already been made well? You see, the Greek word for being "made well" here is *sozo* (*sod-zo*). Often it is translated "to be saved" in our bibles. But it really means "to be made whole;" to be returned to yourself. Ten out of ten were healed that day, but one out of ten was made whole. Ten out of ten were grateful, but one out of ten returned and in the process was returned to himself.

Once heard a touching story about an ex-gang member named Mario. Mario was slowly piecing his life back together after years of being in a gang. For once he had a good job provided by a local ministry that helped gang members get off the streets. On the outside Mario had tattoos that painted his entire body. Even his face and neck were covered so all that you could see were his eyes, nose, mouth. Whenever Mario went places children would stare and point. Mothers would pull their children in opposite directions to keep their distance, like he was a leper. On the outside Mario seemed scary, but on the inside, he was the gentlest, kindest person you might ever meet. One day Mario and some other ex-gang members were asked to speak for a conference at a college. They told their stories about abuse and neglect and abandonment. Then it came to question and answer time. A woman stood up and said, "Mario, you say you have a son and a daughter who are about to enter their teenage years. What wisdom or advice do you give to them?" Mario steps up to the microphone, he's getting nervous. His voice begins to quiver and he is choking on his words when he blurts out, "I just...I just don't want my kids to turn out like me." And there is a lonely silence when the woman speaks: "Why wouldn't you want your kids to turn out like you? You are loving. You are gentle. You are kind. You are wise. I hope your kids turn out to be like you!" And then a roomful of strangers stood up and the people began to clap and they wouldn't stop clapping. All Mario could do feeling the weight of the affirmation was to fall to his knees, his face buried in his hands. Overwhelmed that a room full of strangers had returned him to himself. And here's the thing: everybody in the room found themselves returned to themselves as well. Ten out of ten.

So as a kickoff to stewardship and our capital campaign—before we start talking projects and budgets and pledge cards—we are going to invite you to come forward to be anointed with oil—a balm of healing for whatever you are going through. And you are invited to dip your hands in baptism's waters, reminded of who you fully are. Maybe you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed or drowning in anxiety. Maybe you are in survival mode and exhausted. Maybe you are feeling disconnected from God. It could be physical or emotional or spiritual. Whatever it is, ten out of ten of us could probably use a moment of healing, to be returned to ourselves, and to be grateful.

{Healing Station: people are invited to come forward while hymn is being sung. Healing ointment, healing water, healing words will be provided by ministers and deacons}