

Healing Through Obedience, Salvation Through Common Cries for Mercy based on Luke 17:11-19, David Jahnke, 10/9/16

So leprosy in Jesus' day referred to anyone who had a skin disease. And they were unclean if and when the disease broke out. And if it was chronic, they were quarantined in rural areas or on the edge of towns and villages. They would ask for alms in well-traveled areas alongside roads, to supplement whatever meager existence they could provide for themselves. You can imagine how difficult their lives were-- physically, emotionally, financially. This was what Jesus transformed through his healing.

One of the lepers who shouted out to Jesus for mercy was a Samaritan. Samaritans were heretics to Jews because they only believed in the first five books of the Bible and they had their own temple for sacrifices. So this guy had two strikes against him. But his leprosy actually took precedence over his religion in this society, granting him solidarity with the other Jewish lepers.

I went to an inter-faith service the other night. I was thinking about how everyone there has had personal trials and feelings of uncleanness and/or social isolation-- some much more than others. One of the groups who sponsored the event is Community Access Unlimited who provide assistance to special people in Union County. Many of their clients were at the service. The director spoke at the beginning of the service about how they often are made to feel excluded as people stare or glare or ignore or generally do not know how to relate to them. But at this service, they were front and center.

Like the Samaritans, quote-unquote "heretics" and "infidels" were front and center as well, representing various Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. In the solidarity of our common humanity, our brokenness and our pursuit of the universals of God, we together lifted up a common cry for help, mercy and healing-- lepers one and all. This is where redemption begins.

A facebook friend who is battling cancer posted this the other day:
"I was in the ER last night getting checked for a possible blood clot. I am so tired today. Had to peel myself out of bed to get Mia from art class while Suzanne is having a much needed time out with a couple of friends. Next it is the workout class at the YMCA tonight. I'll just take a [painkiller] and run out the door. I am glad that I inspire people, but you need to know that there are times when I am tired, in pain, and I just ask God to help me do it. You can do the same."

There are two critical things here. 1. Recognizing our need for God and throwing ourselves upon his mercy. Doing this brings tremendous relief and renewal because we are giving ourselves over to faith and hope. And that transforms us. 2. And secondly, we see someone broken by the world still doing what God is calling him to do to live into health and strength and new life. And we must do the same.

This is an important part of our gospel lesson in which there is an important change from Jesus' earlier healing of a leper. The first time Jesus healed first and then told him to go and offer a thanksgiving gift to the priest at the temple.

But in our story, Jesus tells all of the lepers to go to the priests right away. He is telling them, "Do what you are supposed to do in the case of healing and maybe you will be surprised." After they listen to Jesus and take a baby step of faith and do what they are supposed to do, they are healed.

So maybe we are not receiving the deep healing and cleansing of our soul because we are hesitant to take baby steps of faith. Maybe we have to trust Jesus' power to heal and cleanse and do what he tells us to do. I would not call it a pre-requisite to healing as Jesus healed plenty before they did or believed much of anything! Jesus can and does heal whenever and however he wishes.

There are also no guarantees that this or that step will bring the miracle that we desire.

I also cannot tell you the particular baby steps Jesus is calling you to take. There are so many possibilities. The first two that the text suggests in Jesus telling the lepers to a. go to the temple and b. offer sacrifices of thanksgiving are: 1. come to church more often; perhaps one more time a month every month; 2. offer your time, talents and treasures to church and charities more often and/or more abundantly.

Other possibilities include: 3. committing to praying in a way that acknowledges God's existence and power to heal; 4. joining small groups or reading the gospels with an ear open to the Spirit guiding you; 5. committing to daily walks or workouts. 6. Simply doing less wrong and more right and supplicating to God to help where you struggle.

There is a lot I cannot tell you but I can tell you this-- the more we listen to Jesus and trust in him and do the things that he tells us to do, the more His Spirit will come alive in us and make things new.

In our small groups this week, we explored how Jesus is God's only Son, our Lord, in the Apostles' Creed. N.T. Wright spoke about how there is no use in calling Jesus, "Lord, Lord!" and then ignoring him when he tells us to do something. Jesus himself warned his followers about this and concluded that only those who do the will of the Father shall inherit the Kingdom!

We will leave it up to God who inherits the Kingdom in eternity but communing with the Father's will in the present makes us heirs and citizens of the Kingdom now.

Wednesday night gave 600 people at the inter-faith service a glimpse into what that Kingdom is like. And among the many incredible components of the service, I have a video of one that particularly moved me and is relevant for this sermon. The woman who is singing is Kayla Richardson, a 16-year old born blind:

"Tomorrow" by the Winans
Jesus said, "Here I stand.
Won't you please let me in?"
And you said, "I will tomorrow"

Jesus said , "I am he
who supplies all your needs."
And you said
"I know, but tomorrow. Ooh, tomorrow,
I'll give my life tomorrow,
I thought about today oooohh,
but it's so much easier to say...
Tomorrow, who promised you tomorrow?
Better choose the Lord today,
for tomorrow very well might be too late.

Jesus said , "Here I stand,
won't you please take my hand?"
And you said, "I will tomorrow."

Jesus said , "I am he
who supplies all your needs."
And you said , "I know, but tomorrow.
Ooh, tomorrow. I'll give my life tomorrow,
I thought about today oooohh,
but it's so much easier to say...

Tomorrow, who promised you tomorrow?
Better choose the Lord today,
for tomorrow very well might be too late.

And who said tomorrow would ever come for you?
Still you laugh and play and continue on to say, "Tomorrow"
Forget about tomorrow.
Won't you give your life today? oohh
Please don't just turn and walk away
Tomorrow, tomorrow is not promised
Don't let this moment slip away
Your tomorrow could very well begin today

Are you listening to the voice of Jesus? His Word is ever-present, gently suggesting that you open the door of your hearts and let him in; and powerfully calling you out into the world to do his will. Don't wait until tomorrow to let him come in to your heart; don't wait until tomorrow to bless his children when opportunities arise today...

This describes so well

in Luke's version of this story. Instead of the lepers first being healed and then told to
Jesus told the lepers to go to the

in our various understandings of him, "Jesus, have mercy on me."

A few of them had Turret's-type tics that made them shout out in the middle of the service

we still struggle to show love and compassion to

I went to the inter-faith service the other night along with a couple of other members of our church. I think that everyone at the service has personal trials and feelings of uncleanness in common with the lepers.

We had people from nearly every faith tradition-- Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Christians. There were also 20 or so disabled friends from Community Access Unlimited. A blind woman sang an incredible solo called

17:17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

17:18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

17:19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."