



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Reading: Luke 17.11-19 (NT page 1051)

Background of the reading – Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

As every one of you know very well, things worked differently in Biblical times than they do today, and their understanding and treatment of sickness and disease is no exception to this. If we thus take a look at the background of the reading, it will help us to understand the text better.

Today we know that if you feel unwell, it is most probably due to the fact that a virus or bacteria is attacking your body. And when this happens, we go to the surgery, see a GP, get medicine and advice and then get better.

But in Biblical times things were not that simple. *Especially* if the disease you had was leprosy.

You might find it interesting that the leprosy we read about in the Bible is not the same disease that we call leprosy today – the only similarity is that both these diseases are skin conditions.

Biblical leprosy was seen as a punishment for sins. They believed that when somebody sinned in secret, and could thus not publically be punished for what they had done, God would make this sin visible by means of a scar on the skin. This explains why a priest, and not a doctor, declared somebody as healed.

Leprosy made you unholy, and to be part of the people of God meant that you had to be holy. And they also believed that leprosy was extremely contagious – even clothes and houses could be affected by it, which resulted in the complete banning of people who had leprosy out of the community.

People who had this disease were placed in a kind of “quarantine”, which meant that they had to live in isolation, had to wear torn clothes and were not allowed to comb their hair. They had to cover the bottom bit of their faces and if someone came in their direction that had to shout at the top of their voices: “Unclean, unclean!!” to avoid contaminating anyone else.

To wear torn clothes and not to comb your hair was a sign of mourning in Biblical times, and people with leprosy were literally mourning, because they were cut off from community with God and their people.

But for 10 people with leprosy all of this changed, because they met Jesus.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, but before he entered one of the villages on his way there, 10 men with leprosy saw him, and true to the customs of the time, kept their distance and shouted: “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

And then, what did Jesus do? He immediately replied: “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” Actually they were required to only show themselves to the priests when they were already healed, and then the priest would make very sure that they had no sign of the disease left and would then cleanse them and declare them as part of the community again. (This of course was the day about which every single person with leprosy dreamed.)

And now Jesus sends these 10 men to the priest, without having healed them first. The fact that they were obedient to him was more than enough evidence to Jesus that they believed him and knew that he had the power to heal them, and because of that He did heal them while they were on their way to the priests.

But now we come to the most important part of our story: What happened when they realized that they were healed? Only 1 of them turned around to thank Jesus for healing him. In other words: Only 1 of them realized that not only did Jesus heal him physically, but also changed his whole life. He was now a new person. He not only now had the opportunity to become part of the community again, but because he chose to go and say thank you to Jesus, he also made himself a part of the family of God.

And to top it all, he wasn't even a purebred Jew (like the other 9, who was supposed to realize these things); he was a Samaritan – one of the half-Jews who were despised by the purebred Jews because seemingly they did not serve God in the correct manner.

The 9 who were born as part of the people of God just continued with their lives as if it was nothing special that Jesus had healed them, the Samaritan realized that a miracle had happened to him, and he gave God the recognition that He deserved for that.

Sermon – Rev Dr A J Groenewald

Text verse¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

How do you feel when people do not thank you or at least show their appreciation? Yes we all know that feeling of hurt and disappointment because it feels as if that person did not even see all the effort that was put in.

I think it is the same when it comes to our relationship with God. We must show our appreciation that He is part of our existence in the way we respond in faith to Him. No one can be the same after realizing that He saved us from sin, death and hell, just like the Samaritan did.

How do we show our gratitude for the miracle He did in our lives? We need to listen to His words and obey Him – always and ever. We need to trust Him in the good and bad times of our lives. When we go through low valleys, we need to take his hand and leave the hands of this world that are so easily to get hold of like liquor, drugs, and bad friends. It is like the story where the people had a special day of prayer for rain and the little girl who asked her mother during the service but why did no one bring any umbrellas! If we trust and believe in God we need to show it.

We need to give him all our time. We need to show with our lives of faith that He is the centre of our whole existence. How? Well by attending worship services, through a life of prayer and dedication and a life full of gratitude.

Today is a special day. I really hope we all feel grateful for the great things that God has done for us all in Jesus Christ. I do hope this feeling of thanksgiving will continue till we are having the same service next year. Let us all be inspired by everyone who dedicates their lives to God through service in this congregation when we visit all the stalls. And if God's Holy Spirit is speaking to you personally to get more involved, take the first step and give us your name and state your interest. Why? WELL, because it is like Jesus once said: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few".

Today is the day where we have the opportunity to show our trust in the Lord through our gifts. Let us be moved by God's Spirit to share these gifts with others not only today but every second of every day. Let us show our selfish world how wonderful it is to live a life of sharing, thanksgiving and prayer. But let us open our hearts to God and allow Him to work through the many gifts that we have received from His fatherly hand. We did not all receive the same gifts but every gift is special and fulfils a special need in the vineyard of God's church on earth. We do not have to be super special people who never ever make mistakes. We do not have to be super rich or mightily important. We do not have to be the brightest of stars. In God's eyes everyone matters and is equally important. But everyone needs to share those gifts although you might think that is no big deal. It is only after you share it with others, that you realise what you received from God. Let us think here of Susan Boyle who surprised everyone by her gift of singing although no-one could even think at her first appearance that she could sing! But once she opened her mouth everyone could hear her gift and hopefully realised that it came only from God.

Let us stop worrying about what the world or other people will say when:

We sing with flat notes in the worship service, when we stumble over our words when we pray, when we do not wear the best clothes to church, when our children do not behave the way they should in church, when we do not always feel very faithful ...In our reading He healed a Samaritan – someone that was not a favourite in the eyes of his society, someone that suffered a double misfortune – being unwell, unholy and being a Samaritan! But God looks at people with different eyes. Eyes that are full of love, just the same way He looks at you and me!

The Lord God knows our hearts. Let us just mean it when we say "thank you, Lord"! Let us just do what the Samaritan did – going out of our comfy ways to thank our only Lord and Saviour, every moment of everyday!

May today be a BIG THANK YOU to the Lord who loves us just as we are, and who showed us mercy and grace! Hallelujah!

Amen.