

THE OTHER NINE

Lawrence Peak October 2nd 2022

Today we read the well-known account of Jesus healing the ten lepers, as documented by Luke in his Gospel. We know the story well don't we – ten lepers come to Jesus for healing; word must have gotten around that great signs and wonders followed Jesus wherever he went – and they were full of expectation.

Jesus tells them to go to the temple for official pronouncement that they were indeed clean – only one comes back, a Samaritan, to thank Jesus, praise him and prostrate himself before Jesus. Jesus says “go in peace, your faith has made you whole” - and openly questions where the other nine might be.

There are four points I want to draw from today's story:-

- Jesus performs yet another miracle of healing'
- Jesus sees himself as well and truly part of the established church there. He was born and bred a Jew.
- Jesus reaches out to a Samaritan
- And finally, Jesus declares him “Whole”

Firstly, another miracle! There are many recorded in the Gospels. Some are highlighted in fair detail such as this one; others receive just a passing mention

Such as in Matthew Chapter 9 where he records

“Jesus went about all the cities and villages teaching and preaching and healing all manner of diseases and all manner of sickness” Matthew 9 verse 35.

And again in Luke 4 Verses 40 – 41

“When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them”.

No further explanation or amplification. Not making a big deal of them but recording them just the same!

And there are something like fourteen instances of what I call these untrumpeted miracles scattered throughout the Gospel accounts.

In a series of studies entitled “Faith and Science” held some time ago in this church, we asked ourselves the question “What are we to make of these miracles in today's modern age?” Our conclusion was that they did not represent cases where the laws of nature, upon which we depend every moment of every day, ceased to operate. Rather, that there may be additional

laws at play when God is very close to a human situation. Laws we may eventually come to understand, but which are not part of our current scientific understanding.

As has been said

“Because Jesus was the person he was, it is not surprising he did the things he did!”

My feeling regarding the miracles of Jesus is that there are too many of them simply to be dismissed as metaphor, or wishful thinking, or creative writing with a lot of artistic licence or the limited understanding of medicine in those fairly primitive times.

To quote Shakespeare in Hamlet’s surmising

“There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio than are dreamt of in our philosophy”

Secondly. Jesus saw himself as very much part of the Jewish church scene - being born and bred a Jew. He attended the synagogue regularly – as was his custom – so the account goes. He had learned discussions with the church intellectuals at the age of 12. He had a grasp of all the Old Testament scriptures and often quoted from them. He saw himself, not as replacing those Old Testament visions, but completing and fulfilling them.

It seems quite fitting therefore that Jesus would send the lepers to the Temple for official verification that they were now clean and leprosy-free. No doubt he could have healed them and that would have been that; but it is interesting that he chose to involve the church in the process.

Of course Jesus took issue with the church’s preoccupation with ritual - especially regarding the observance of the Sabbath. Ridiculous prescriptions down to every little jot and tittle that no-one would have any hope of fulfilling perfectly. No, Jesus’ issue was not with the church itself – rather when ritual was replacing God.

We too should be careful to ensure that all our ritual – committees, deadlines, organisation, groups, outings etc do not become so prominent that we are essentially worshipping and honouring these things instead of God. For the scribes, Pharisees and Chief Priests, ritual had virtually replaced God. That’s what Jesus took issue with!

Thirdly,

Jesus reached out to not only a leper, but also a Samaritan.

Lepers had the most dreadful existence! They were unclean and shunned by society, They had to scrounge a daily existence by begging and had no hope nor future.

In Leviticus we read

The person with such and infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out "Unclean unclean". As long as he has the infection he remains unclean, He must live alone, he must live outside the camp".

There was also the burden of guilt they had to carry around with them as it was usually interpreted as a punishment from God for their sins or the sins of their parents,

The precise meaning of leprosy in the Old Testament is still in dispute but it probably includes the modern Hansen's Disease and other infectious skin diseases. It affected the nervous system creating numbness in the limbs which itself was often the main problem. Lepers would often be completely unaware of damage to their limbs be it because of bites or burns or some other serious damage because of this numbness. The late Dr Paul Brand wrote a wonderful book with Philip Yancey entitled "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" definitely worth a read if you come across it. As Dr Brand wrote, discussing his pioneering work among lepers

"I cannot think of a greater gift I could give my leprosy patients than pain"

Samaritans were viewed as traitors to the Jewish heritage having intermarried in the Northern Kingdom with the Assyrians and other nations, and as a result losing their lineage and proud tradition.

Jesus had no trouble with Samaritans, reaching out to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, and making the hero of his famous parable a Samaritan, a GOOD Samaritan!

Jesus reached out to this leper who was also a Samaritan. We don't know about the others – presumably they weren't all Samaritans as Jesus makes a special point of mentioning it about the grateful leper who returned.

As we all know, Jesus crossed all barriers reaching out to women, lepers, Samaritans, prostitutes, tax gatherers and even a thief on the cross. He has shown us that God's love has no boundaries – no matter how hopeless, or dirty or radical or cynical or proud or selfish or pig-headed. No matter how “unacceptable” others might categorise some people – God' love is reaching out to them just the same!

Fourthly and Finally

Jesus told the grateful leper “Your faith has made you **whole**” This suggests to me a whole lot more than just being cured of leprosy.

Presumably, the other nine didn't recontract leprosy just because they didn't return to acknowledge and thank Jesus.

So I am guessing that they remained “cured” but not completely “whole”. As I see it the thankful leper became whole when he bowed down before Jesus, acknowledged him and thanked him.

We can be healthy, wealthy and wise and have everything in the world that people yearn for; but if we do not have God in the very centre of our lives, the God who was present in Jesus and revealed by Jesus; if we don't bow down and worship, acknowledge and thank this God, we too will not be completely “whole”.

To be whole is to be an integrated person who has God at the very centre of all the compartments of one's life. We can then experience something of God's love, God's compassion. God's vision and perspectives.

To be whole is to be the way God made us – the way we were meant to be.

We don't know about the other nine but it seems as if they took God's gift for granted. We too can so easily take for granted the gifts God continually showers upon us - like the other nine.

We don't know what happened to the other nine - but the leper who returned to praise God became whole,

So can we!

Amen.