

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 12, 2025
St. Michaels Church
By The Rev. Joshua Wong

Today's Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you. O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

In our Gospel passage today, Jesus is traveling about, teaching, and healing, and his eyes are open to those who come to hear him. He sees those who gather around him and feels the suffering of the people. Jesus encounters a group of lepers. The mention of leprosy in the Bible is not uncommon. The Old Testament contains several stories of people with leprosy, including Naaman the Syrian general whom we just read about in today's Old Testament reading. Then there is Miriam, Moses' sister who also had leprosy. In the New Testament, leprosy is also mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels as a condition that Jesus healed in order to demonstrate his power and compassion. In Biblical times, leprosy was considered incurable and therefore those who had it were ostracized from society. Many believed that leprosy was a form of punishment from God for their sinfulness, therefore they were often mistreated and forgotten. Because of their condition, they were prohibited from entering any temples, nor could they participate in any religious ceremonies. When they saw Jesus entering their village, we can only imagine their

hope for a new life. What an act of faith for the ten lepers to call out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean."

Today, there is a lot we can learn from this Gospel reading along with the parallel story about the Syrian general Naaman. Biblical scholars say that in the Bible, leprosy symbolizes the sinful human condition we have before God. All of us need healing from our brokenness and isolation.

In our modern world, we may not encounter people with leprosy, which is now called Hansen's disease, but the broken human condition is observable in other ways. Take for example the brokenness in our political system that lead to the gross inequality of income between the wealthy and the poor, or how our political system has eliminated DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) in many companies that removed the protection of rights for people of color, and sexual orientation. Brokenness also is reflected in different forms of substance or behavioral abuse often causing broken marriages and broken families.

In the story of the ten lepers, we might benefit to pause for a moment and image the pain of the lepers before their healing. Can we imagine what being an exile

might feel like, or what it must feel like to be hated and excluded for a condition we have no control over?

Today, there are many people who still live in some form of exile. An example of isolation and loneliness comes from being bullied. Kids who act or feel different are bullied and left to feel excluded and alone. Studies have shown that the combination of intense bullying by classmates, a deep sense of alienation, a troubled family life, and easy access to guns are the ingredients for the next school shooter.

When Jesus encountered the lepers on his way into the village, we noticed that He doesn't judge them, but showed compassion on them. He swiftly commanded them to act, "Go and show yourself to the priest" in order for their new life to begin. In this incidence, Jesus did not simply say, "believe" and they were healed, but gave them a command to act. This story has many parallels with the Naaman story. Elisha had commanded Naaman also to act. In the beginning, Naaman resisted these instructions, but later obeyed. Both of these stories were about acting as though they had already been healed, and when they did act, then they saw that they had in fact been cleansed from their leprosy. This acting on the basis of God's word, is the nature of faith.

There are two action phrases found in both stories. They are “Go in faith” and “Return with gratitude.” In both stories, their action was their form of faith.

Where is Jesus asking us to Go by faith? Maybe God is saying Go and call someone who may be alone today? Go and have coffee with someone and show some love. The same applies to our church, where is Jesus asking St. Michael’s to Go by faith in the coming months, or the coming year? Who is God calling us to go to? Remember, when we act, God will bring about his purpose.

When I’m at Otis on Tuesdays, I feel Jesus’ commandment to “Go by faith.” Go and be with these students, be present in their lives, let them know that out there in this sometimes cold lonely world, there are strangers who care about them. Go and be my representation of Christ to them. By Going by faith, we might be the ones that will extinguish the loneliness they often feel in their lives.

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. The second action phrase in our stories is “Return with gratitude.” Both the leper and Naaman remembered to return with gratitude. Scripture says, “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back praising God with a loud voice.” For Naaman, scripture says, “Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before Elisha and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”

When we first heard this Gospel, you may also have noticed that there was only one leper that returned? Commentators have suggested that the others probably continued to do exactly what Jesus had commanded them to do, go to the priest. What Jesus commanded them to do was completely spontaneous, and the expression of gratitude was never a requirement for them in order to be healed. Even Jesus cannot force us to be grateful, it must come from our own revelation. What we notice here is that all were healed whether or not they returned. The grace of God cannot be calculated, grace is always free. Grace and gratitude are related linguistically and theologically. The root for the English word "grace" is from the Latin word gratia, meaning "thankful." There can be no awareness of grace without gratitude, nor gratitude without an awareness of grace.

We may ask ourselves then, which one am I? Am I the grateful leper or one of the other nine? To be saved is not only to be healed and forgiven but to be relieved from the self-centeredness that inhibits grateful praise.

In God's love, ingratitude does not cancel out grace. Human lack of faith does not cancel God's faithfulness to us. But having said that, we notice that there is hurt in the voice of Jesus that only one person returned. The others are just as cleansed by God but do not recognize that it calls forth the response of praise and thanksgiving.

On its face value, these passages may seem that thankfulness is the main message. And yes, it could be, the practice of thankfulness does enlarge, bless, and restore our soul to wholeness.

Yet, we cannot forget that this message is about our own human condition. We may not have Hansen's disease, but metaphorically, we need God's healing.

Where is the brokenness within yourself that is keeping you in isolation from your neighbor and from your relationship with God? In my life, where does Jesus need to enter and heal me? And where is St. Michael's called to Go to be God's healing agent. Part of our healing and growth in discipleship is learning to see, hear, and tend to our souls and to those around us—to see one another as Jesus sees them, as people in need of compassion and hope.

Jesus says to the one who returned with gratitude, "Your faith has made you well." Everyday, when we Go in faith, and Return with gratitude, our faith becomes transformed to our truest selves. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.