

**Can You See Where You Are Going?**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
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**Luke 17:11-19**  
**October 9, 2016**

There once were ten men who could not see. They weren't blind in the traditional sense. They had their sight – they saw shapes and colors just as clear as you and me. But honestly, it wasn't doing them much good. Because despite their sight, they still couldn't see a future for themselves. They had no hope.

And why should they have seen a future? These men were lepers. Leprosy was the number one public health hazard in ancient Israel. The condition was highly contagious, and even the slightest trace of leprosy meant quarantine, exile, and most likely death. Might as well just resign to your fate, right?

It's strange then, that Alan Culpepper would call this passage about ten lepers who have no reason to see a future, a passage that is all about sight.

But that's exactly what today's passage is: it's a lesson about seeing.

Sharon Ringe tells us that Torah required lepers to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" to any passersby. But that's not what happens here. Jesus enters a village. The lepers see him, and keeping their distance, they shout, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." And the text tells us that Jesus sees them.

Luke's gospel reminds us that everyone, even the most unlikely of people, have the ability to notice the presence of God in their midst. And Luke's gospel reminds us that Jesus had the ability to see and notice everyone, even, especially, the ones that society refused to acknowledge.

The text doesn't tell us how Jesus interacts with the ten men. We don't know if he lays hands on them, or hugs them, or offers any physical contact. But his next action gives us a hint. He tells the men to go and show themselves to the priests. In Israel, it was only the priests who could declare a person clean or healed. Once they certified your status, you could re-enter into normal society.

The ten men begin to make their way to the priests, and as they do, they are made clean.

How does that look? It's hard to say. Maybe as they start walking away, they notice their skin begin to magically regenerate. Or maybe it's like when you go to the doctor's office for poison ivy and they give you a steroid. The rash doesn't go away immediately, but you know the process has begun. You have a sense of confidence that normalcy will resume. Or maybe, it was less about anything physical, and more about a sense of acknowledgement. Maybe these men had been ignored for so long, that upon hearing words of acceptance and encouragement from an authority figure, they finally feel restored and whole again.

Whatever the case may be, the text tells us that they are made clean.

Nine of the ten men do not break stride. They high-tail it to the priest. They've got their papers, they are gonna get them stamped, and they'll put this whole ugly mess behind them.

But the tenth man realizes the magnitude of the moment. As he walks away, it hits him that he's healed. Really healed. He's been made whole. And the realization stops him in his tracks. "Praise God!" he says. And he turns back toward Jesus, prostrates himself at Jesus' feet, and thanks him for what he's done. A trip to see the priest can wait, but expressing gratitude for God's gifts cannot.

And oh by the way, Luke reminds us he was a Samaritan.

Several months ago, we talked about the parable of the Good Samaritan. Martin Luther King notes that as the priest and Levite passed the injured man on the side of the road they asked an important question: "What's gonna happen to me if I stay here?" But the Good Samaritan asked a better question: "What's gonna happen to my neighbor if I don't stay here?"

Seven chapters later, it's another Samaritan who asks the better question. The other nine men who are made clean are rightfully concerned about their wellbeing. They are ready to re-enter the world they once knew. And so they ask: How do I find the priest? But the tenth man, a Samaritan, asks another question: "Have I offered thanks to God?"

The tenth man sees what is abundantly clear: God is present in this moment, God is behind this healing, and God deserves our praise. The other nine men will mostly likely get the pronouncement from the priest they seek. They'll be deemed clean. But they are not yet fully-healed. One wonders what will happen when the next crisis comes along: a debt; grief from the loss of a loved one; a broken heart; an emotional scar that won't heal – Will a priest be able to rubber stamp such problems away?

Money, power, medicine, fine clothes and fancy cars, certificates of proof – all of these things; the things that St. Augustine called earthly things – they can and do provide temporary relief. They are what we call a cure. But the tenth man sees what Luke's Gospel implores each of us to see: God is not temporary; God is not an earthly thing; God is not a cure for what ails you. Luke tells us that God is permanent; God leads us beyond the earthy dimension; God offers us true healing.

By acknowledging his gratitude for God, the tenth man sees that God is his source, God is his strength, God is the help that steers him through. And like that Samaritan, when we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, we free ourselves from dependence on systems that cannot and will not sustain us. When we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, we are not met by a punitive Creator, but rather, a loving Creator who offers us grace and mercies beyond measure. And when we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, we no longer grope blindly, searching for temporary cures and remedies, but rather, we see clearly a world that offers us wholeness and healing.

When the tenth man realized all of this, he had to stop and say, "Praise God!!!"

Too often, I think it's easy for us to lose sight of why we gather every Sunday morning. After all, we're busy people, and we live in a world that demands tangible results. We will be made whole if our weekend is successful. And our weekend will only be successful if we complete our checklist: groceries bought; house cleaned; yard mowed; a Panthers victory we get to actually watch every minute of; no wait at the K&W for Sunday lunch; Monday's meeting notes prepped on Saturday morning; time with our friends and family; a nap; and on and on and on.

And in such a world, it's not hard to ask, "Did my presence here today make a difference?"

Today's passage offers us a resounding "Yes!!!" Your presence is important!!!

When we come to praise our Maker, we proclaim that God is present in our lives. When we come to praise our Maker, we proclaim that God matters. And when we come to praise our maker, we proclaim, however difficult it may sometimes be to admit, that a power much, much bigger than us is at work in the world. And that power is good and decent and pure and whole and EVERLASTING!!! And our every action should acknowledge such a power.

I'm fortunate. I've never been a leper or an outcast. Though, like anyone, I experience my ups and downs. And like everyone, I sometimes wonder if a world full of brokenness will ever be made whole again.

And then I come to Sardis on Sunday mornings. And I see your faces. And I hear your prayers – prayers of thanksgiving and petition. And I hear your songs. And I receive your embrace. And I am reminded once more of a God who is present, of a God who offers healing, of a God who is at work in us whether we like it or not.

Friends, when we come together to gather in worship, we join the tradition of two Samaritans. We see clearly. We do not fixate on a future destination, hurriedly wondering how we'll make it there in record time. Instead, we pause in gratitude, offering thanks for a God who will show us where to go. Such a route may not always be direct. In fact, it will most likely be hard, and tedious, and tiring, and no doubt inconvenient to our busy schedules. But should we choose to follow such a path, it will lead us to a future full of healing and wholeness. The priests and their rubber stamps you seek will still be there in an hour. In the interim, let's turn back, acknowledge the Christ, pause, and offer our thanks to God.

Oh the places we'll go, and oh the things we'll see!!!

Amen.