

Dear friends,

This week we think about what really matters. We have the story of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus, yet only one of them returned to thank him – and that one the most unlikely of them to have done it. All ten were deemed outcast but still had faith in God and did not hesitate to do what Jesus asked – perhaps the nine who didn't return to thank Jesus were so excited at their healing that they dashed home to family. I hope that as we go into the autumn now that you are doing well and, as always, I wish you every blessing. Margaret.

Call to worship:

Come in faith to worship the Lord – come in obedience to serve others.

Come in thanksgiving to celebrate God's healing grace and inclusive love.

Come, for the Lord is calling you. Amen.

God of all, help us in our worship and in our lives, to cross the boundaries of prejudice, of suspicion, of fear, of intolerance, of superiority and of doubt – and make us faithful to your all-inclusive love. Bless us with the ingredients of a faith that is real and make us obedient to your purposes for our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Living God, grant us the faith that braves the unknown – the humility that listens and shares – the thankfulness which rejoices at every blessing – the obedience that embraces opportunity – the courage which picks itself up and starts again – the love which reflects your concern for all people in all places. Amen.

The words to 'To God be the glory' by Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) [1820-1915]**Singing the Faith 94**

1 To God be the glory, great things he has done!

So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,

who yielded his life in atonement for sin,

and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Refrain: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father through Jesus the Son;

and give him the glory- great things he has done!

2 O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,

to every believer the promise of God!

And every offender who truly believes,

that moment from Jesus a pardon receives: *Refrain*

3 Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,

and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;

but purer, and higher, and greater will be

our wonder, our rapture when Jesus we see: *Refrain*

Prayer including the Lord's Prayer:

Lord, you are gracious and compassionate, loving and just in all your ways.

We give you praise for all that you are – holy and awesome, wise and good.

You are our God forever and we worship you today and always. Amen.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us when we cross the boundary from truth to exaggeration – from habit to addiction – from disappointment to bitterness – from apathy to neglect – from routine to rigidity – from borrowing to keeping – from confidence to conceit.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Holy Spirit has the power and the willingness to clean our hearts and minds today, ridding us from the things that hinder us.

Thank you, O God, for your Spirit's cleansing presence, and that we can be renewed, daily, with assurance of your forgiveness and grace. Amen.

Maker, redeemer, life-giving God, we thank you for all that you have done for us.

We acknowledge the myriad ways you have impacted our lives – the times you have helped us, healed us, drawn near to us.

We recognise that there will be times when you have helped us, but we did not see – we thank you for those too!

Help us to perceive your working in our lives and renew in us a spirit of gratitude.

Thank you, Lord, for all you have done for us! Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 17: 11-19. (The New Testament – Volume One: The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. By William Barclay. Copyright William Barclay 1968)

When Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he was going through the borderland between Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They kept their distance and shouted: 'Jesus, Master, take pity on us!' When he saw them, he said to them: "Go and show yourselves to the priests." While they were on the way, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw that he was cured, turned back praising God at the top of his voice. He threw himself down at Jesus' feet in gratitude. And he was a Samaritan.

Jesus said: "Were the whole ten not cleansed? Where are the nine? Didn't anyone come back to give praise to God except this foreigner?"

"Rise and go," he said to him. "Your faith has cured you."

Comment:

This is a parable of memory and, in particular, that of the 10 lepers who were healed. Luke is clear that the miracle takes place 'on the way to Jerusalem' – it is a story on the road to the cross. The incident is also reported as taking place in the region between Samaria and Galilee, which would suggest that they are heading in the wrong direction to go to Jerusalem – but it could highlight the nature of the miracle.

Luke sets the action on the boundary, the borderlands, a grey or indeterminate area, which is neither wholly Jewish nor wholly Gentile. Many of the people healed by Jesus came from outcast or banned categories – people whose illness or disability removed them from society, and therefore [so it was thought] from God’s rescue. Yet Jesus takes time to touch, thereby risking his own position, and to heal.

The status of the 10 lepers as outsiders is underscored further by their response. As instructed, they go to the priest and are declared cleansed and healed – but only one remembers Jesus and returns to say thank you. And if that wasn’t bad enough in itself, the information that the man who returned was a Samaritan compounds it even more. This man would be doubly frowned upon because of his illness and his race. He would have been viewed as being opposed to God and God’s people. And yet, he is the only one who remembers, and whose life is truly changed. So this is also a parable of inclusion: God is truly the Lord of all creation, and nothing is beyond his concern.

Meditation of Matthew: [A Most Amazing Man – Year C; by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2009 Nick Fawcett]

They were healed, all ten of them – their skin made clean, their lives transformed – and you’d have thought, wouldn’t you, they’d have rushed back immediately, desperate to thank the man who’d made them well.

But they didn’t, most instead dashing off as fast as their legs would carry them, without even a backward glance.

They were excited, I suppose – impatient to return to their loved ones and share the news – and, heaven knows, I can understand that, for they’d been through misery such as you can scarcely imagine.

It seemed rude, nonetheless, for they owed Jesus so much, yet couldn’t be bothered to acknowledge the debt.

All, that is, except one. He stopped, incredulous, the moment he realised what had happened...then turned and hurried back, glorifying and praising God, throwing himself at the Master’s feet with tears of joy, thankful beyond words.

And do you know what? He was a *Samaritan*! That’s right, the last person you’d expect according to popular opinion – an outsider, foreigner, heretic.

It reinforced what we knew already: that Jesus has time for those the world doesn’t.

I shouldn’t have needed reminding, of course, for it’s true amongst his closest followers – me included! – yet how often do we write people off, failing to see who they really are?

Don’t make that mistake, putting restrictions on God’s love and purpose.

Don’t let prejudice close your mind. Learn to look, as Jesus does, beyond the label to the person underneath. What you find may surprise you.

Prayer:

When we are tempted to write people off, Lord, unable to see past their faults – when prejudice and preconception dictate our attitudes, closing our minds to those around us; remind us that you refuse to write anyone off, determined instead to seek until you find.

Open our hearts to the potential of others, the worth you see in all, lest in rejecting *them*, we reject *you*. Amen

We pray for those struggling to be restored to their communities:
those who have come out of prison,
those who have been serving in the armed forces,
those who have spent many months in hospital,
those who have worked away,
those who have come back after the breakdown of a relationship.
Help us to welcome them – to encourage them – to support them – and to respect them.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

The word to 'In an age of twisted values' by Martin Leckebusch [b. 1962] Singing the Faith 703

1 In an age of twisted values we have lost the truth we need;
in sophisticated language we have justified our greed;
by our struggle for possessions we have robbed the poor and weak –
hear our cry and heal our nations; your forgiveness, Lord, we seek.

2 We have built discrimination on our prejudice and fear;
hatred swiftly turns to cruelty if we hold resentments dear.
For communities divided by the walls of class and race
hear our cry and heal our nations: show us, Lord, your love and grace.

3 When our families are broken; when our homes are full of strife;
when our children are bewildered, when they lose their way in life;
when we fail to give the aged all the care we know we should –
hear our cry and heal our nations with your tender fatherhood.

4 We who hear your word so often choose so rarely to obey;
turn us from our wilful blindness, give us truth to light our way.
In the power of your Spirit come to cleanse us, make us new:
hear our cry and heal our nations till our nations honour you.

Close:

We bring to you, Lord, our memories of our life so far, however long or short, thanking you for all we have learnt. Help us to see ourselves as you see us – and help us to see other people as you see them. Thank you for all the different friends we have. We ask you to show us what really matters. Help us to remember how much you love us and everyone. Amen.

Go to the 'in between' places of our world and share God's love.
Where boundaries should be respected – be sensitive.
Where boundaries should be redrawn – be imaginative.
Where boundaries should be abolished – be courageous.
And in all places, be sure of God's presence with you. Amen.

*Unless otherwise indicated Copyright Roots For Churches [www.rootsforchurches.com]
Reproduced with permission.*