

## **“Disciples Welcome Transformation” – Luke 17:11-19 – October 13, 2019**

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There’s a saying - Misery loves company. A popular movie came out in the mid 80’s. It was called *The Breakfast Club*, and it was about 5 high school students who came together one Saturday morning to spend their day in detention. Each of these kids represented a different stereotype of the population of the school. There was a jock, a nerd, a loner, a popular girl, and a rebel. Under normal circumstances their paths would rarely cross. They each had their place in the society of the school. Each knew their place, and each stayed in it. But this particular day, they were forced to come together. Each one guilty of breaking some school rule and required to spend their Saturday in detention. As their day started, they kept to themselves, but eventually, as monotony and boredom set in, they began interacting with one another and realized, in facing their common punishment, they weren’t so different after all. The walls of fear and prejudice came down, and new relationships began to form.

There’s a certain camaraderie that develops when people face difficult situations together. Even when individuals of completely different walks of life are placed together, prejudices are generally put aside in order that they might face their common adversary. For the kids in *The Breakfast Club*, spending a Saturday cooped up at the high school was pure agony. On a more serious note, the ten men in our gospel lesson faced a much greater foe. They were lepers.

Leprosy was a generic term to describe a variety of contagious skin disorders. People with leprosy were cast out of the community, but they often lived together in groups – sharing their miserable fate. On occasion, these skin disorders would heal, but only a priest could determine if the person could rejoin society. Leprosy was much feared and dreaded by those living in the first century. Leprosy made no distinction between social class and ethnicity, but once a person was afflicted, he or she became an outcast, living on the edges of civilization, forced to beg for survival. Their diseased body was wrongly seen as a punishment for some sin they had committed, but that furthered the stigma against them.

Now of these ten lepers in the story in Luke’s gospel, nine were Jews and one was a Samaritan. Normally Jews and Samaritans would avoid associating with one another. The Jews held an attitude of superiority over the Samaritans even though they shared a common ancestry and some shared beliefs. Yet in the face of their shared ailment, the men put aside their prejudices and lived in their misery in company together.

In Luke’s story, Jesus is going into a village when the ten men call out to him across a distance. They know the law, and because they are unclean due to their leprosy, they stay back from him. The men know Jesus. They call him by name, even addressing him as master. Word of Jesus has spread. His fame has preceded him. They have heard the healing stories and they know what he can do. A glimmer of hope comes to them, so they cry out, as if in a prayer of supplication, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

Hearing their call, Jesus turns and looks toward the voices. Seeing them standing a distance away, he immediately understands their plight. Without hesitation he acts. He doesn't even need to touch them. He makes no explanation to them. He simply says to them, "Go! Show yourselves to the priests." It is the priest that must determine if they are free of the leprosy. They are not yet healed, yet they obey him. They don't balk at his words; they don't argue with him. They simply do what he says. They have faith. And so, they go.

I wonder what happened after they left. Perhaps they were excitedly talking to one another, fantasizing about what their lives would be like when things were back to normal. I can hear them joking and laughing. And then at some point, one of them looks down at his skin, and he realizes he is cured. He starts yelling at the others. "Hey guys! Look!" They all stop and look at their own skin. Some are speechless in their joy. Others dance around, pummeling each other on the back. Visions of life at home, with families and friends, begin to enter their minds. Thoughts of no longer being outcasts. A thousand images assault their minds as the reality of their healing begins to sink in.

And then one says. "Hey wait a minute, before going on, let's go back and see Jesus!" Suddenly they are all quiet. They look at the one who spoke and they realize, he's different from us. The speaker, the Samaritan, feels all eyes are on him. The Jews pull away from him as the old prejudices start to dictate their actions. They have a ritual to perform. They have a priest to visit. They have lives to return to. And in none of those things is a Samaritan welcome. The misery is gone, the company is broken.

In the movie *The Breakfast Club*, there is a scene where two of the high school students interact. Brian is the nerd, and he's having a conversation with Claire the popular girl. They're laughing together and having a good time when Claire suddenly says, "Hey Brian, on Monday, you know, when we're back at school. If I see you in the hallway, or something, and don't say hi to you, well, don't take it personally, okay?" Brian suddenly stops smiling. "I thought we were, you know, friends." Claire responds, "Well, we are friends! But at school, you know, things are different. My friends wouldn't understand." Brian is getting angry, "That is mean. I would never do anything to hurt you like that. I wouldn't be embarrassed to introduce you to my friends." Claire appears to be feeling somewhat uncomfortable, "Well, that's different. Your friends look up to us. They want to be like us, so of course they'd be nice." And Brian starts crying, "You're such a snob. I don't know why I am even talking to you."

The Samaritan is not daunted by the snobbery and conceit of the Jews. He has only one thing on his mind, and he hurries back to see Jesus, all the way he is shouting his praise toward God. He returns to the village and sees Jesus. He runs up to Jesus and prostrates himself on the ground at Jesus' feet and the Samaritan offered his heartfelt thanks.

Jesus looks down at the man, recognizing him as a Samaritan. He asks three rhetorical questions. "Were not all ten made clean? But the other nine? Where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" No doubt all the men were pleased when they were healed. But were they so caught up in their good fortune that they missed seeing the hand of

God in the action? Had they no gratitude for this act of God's grace in their lives? Did the Jews see themselves as being so privileged that they felt deserving of this grace?

And it took the stranger, the foreigner, the Samaritan to recognize this special gift of grace, so that he came rushing back to express his deep gratitude. Thus, Jesus says to him, "Get up and be on your way. Your faith has made you well." What does Jesus mean here? This Samaritan was already healed of his leprosy. In fact, all ten lepers were healed. The healing occurred as they obediently followed Jesus' command to go see the priests. But here, what Jesus is referring to is something beyond physical healing. The faith of the Samaritan has enabled him to see beyond. He recognized God's grace and thus has experienced God's salvation. He has, through his faith, entered into the fellowship of God's kingdom, and thus has been made whole.

The nine other men failed to recognize what the Samaritan saw. They obediently followed Jesus' command and were healed, but they were blind to the greater healing that was offered to them. They missed recognizing the gracious gift of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Their bodies were healed, but their attitudes were untouched. They missed out on the grace.

I wonder how many of us throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus in gratitude and praise when we receive healing in our lives. And I am not just referring to a healing of a physical ailment. I am talking about the myriad of blessings we experience on a daily basis. Perhaps we are more like the 9 men who went on their way, happy to rejoin the comfortable structures and hierarchies of worldly life.

Preacher Fred Craddock wrote: "It is often the stranger in the church who sings heartily the hymns we have long left to the choir, who expresses gratitude for blessings we had not noticed, who listens attentively to the sermons we think we have already heard, who gets excited about our old Bible, and who becomes actively involved in acts of service to which we send a small donation. Must it always be so?"

Perhaps the Samaritan can teach us something about perception, about seeing beyond what is happening in those episodes of healing within our lives, about living with a grateful attitude. Perhaps we can learn to recognize the creativity of God's divine power, bringing order out of chaos, bringing restoration and wholeness into a broken world. When we live our lives grateful for the grace we have received and the blessings we have been given, our attitudes change. Suddenly we're not so self-centered. We no longer embrace feelings of entitlement. When we recognize that we do not deserve any of the grace that God gives us, we will start to become more charitable to our neighbor and more loving to those around us.

If the saying is true, that misery loves company, and we can be accepting of one another in the times of suffering, then shouldn't the opposite be true? Should not blessedness love company? When God's grace crosses the mundane boundaries into our lives, we are often initially startled and held in awe by the healing that comes. Yet our wonder is short lived. The glow of excitement fades and we have a tendency to follow the nine Jews back to the world of comfort.

Instead we should learn from the Samaritan. If we open our eyes and look beyond the episode of healing, we will see the Healer. When we gratefully acknowledge God's gracious activity in our lives, we begin to experience wholeness. When this occurs, we are more able to perceive and to participate in God's saving activity throughout the world.