

Luke 17:11-19

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him---and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Where not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

"Deep Healing"

Ten men. Each with one strike against them, the strike of leprosy. Leprosy was a name given to a range of disturbing conditions from mildew in houses and on clothes to dreaded skin diseases. Every age has its leprosy in which fear and ignorance of the threat of the unknown join religious, social and political forces to demand that the diseased person be removed from sight and isolated from human contact. These ten men were in an age that restricted them as described in Lev. 13:45-46. 'The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease, he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp.'

Ten men. Nine Jews and one foreigner. The foreigner was from Samaria. Being a Samaritan set him back with another strike. Samaritans and Jews were mortal enemies. They did not mingle, they did not talk, and they certainly did not help one another. The concept 'Good Samaritan' would have been an oxymoron in their ancient minds.

Ten men. Nine with one strike against them and one with two. Jesus should not have been talking with any of them. He should have respected the social and religious protective barriers. And they should have accepted their place of isolation, pain, fear, shame and guilt. But they did not. All ten untouchables yelled to the man of God, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" Have a heart! Empathy is the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. Affective and cognitive empathy is the vital first step toward compassionate action. "Jesus, Master, have pity us!" Empathically, Jesus responded, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they started out for the temple to do as Jesus told them a remarkable thing happened. All ten were healed of their skin disease. Amazing, isn't it what empathy can do. Imagine their attitude of gratitude. Imagine how it opened the eyes of their hearts that day to the healing power of God!

But because empathy is only the first step in the healing of hearts, the Samaritan went back to talk with Jesus. Why did he return after being healed? Why did Jesus send them to the priests in the first place and not just heal them on the spot? In her reflection on this passage pastor Maggi Dawn commented: "I think the answer has to do with prejudice, and the way we exclude people from society. In the first-century, priests not only diagnosed leprosy, but also declared a leper ritually unclean. By sending the ten to the priests, Jesus raised the possibility that they would not only be healed but also declared pure, which was essential if they were to reintegrate into society. The twist in the tale is that this particular leper colony was near a village on the border between Galilee and Samaria, communities that were acrimoniously divided. Jews considered all Samaritans ritually unclean and would travel miles out of their way to avoid having any contact with them. Stigmatization is a great leveler; while they were ill the ten lepers had discovered that which side of the border you were from meant nothing if you had leprosy. Once they were healed however, the old divisions kicked into play again. Ten were healed but only nine would be accepted; the tenth would always be unclean because he was a Samaritan. He knew that barriers to joining society on the Galilean side of the border ran far deeper than leprosy (Christian Century).

The Samaritan knew that racism, hate, and prejudice would remain when the tie of leprosy that united him with the others was removed. But more importantly than that, with his healing, he realized that humanly devised divisions don't exist in the God's kingdom of Love. Barriers of gender, race, nationality, sexuality, ethnic background, religious affiliation, intellect, economic status, class, physical and mental conditions . . . the "Ism's" of all kinds that run deep to sicken the human soul just don't exist in the compassionate heart of God. Rather, acceptance and inclusion are the spiritual dynamics in God's reign of Love. And so the man went back in praise of God to thank Jesus for his deep healing of faith, of knowing that he too belonged in the heart of God.

"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow black and white they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

Like the healed Samaritan, we return thanks by welcoming, accepting, and affirming all persons in our community of faith. We develop and enrich our sense of belonging to Jesus by inviting all persons to participate in the healing ministries of the church. And we praise God for the deep healings that we receive whenever we stand up against hate, prejudice, and racism in our society. And we hold fast to the words of deep healing that Jesus spoke to the grateful Samaritan: "Rise and go! Your faith has made you well."

