

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Luke 17:11-21** **“A Step Beyond Healing”**

August 17, 2014  
(10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

LUKE 17:11-21 "A STEP BEYOND HEALING"

(L) NEW TRAVEL REPORT (1)

<b>1) v.11 JESUS' ITINERARY "AT THE BORDERS"</b>		"On the way... passing along... entered"
11	On the way to Jerusalem he (Jesus) was passing along between Samaria (unclean turf) and Galilee (Jewish territory)	9:51, 13:22, 14:25, 4 <sup>th</sup> Travel Report Thus Far North → South, Prophet On Way To The Cross Liminal Zone, Border: Likely East To West

(L) TWO-PART MIRACLE STORY (2)

<b>2) vv.12-19 TWO CASE STUDIES IN HEALING AND WHOLENESS.</b>		People Scared Of Leprosy
		Both Parts: 1) Approach + Cry, 2) Identity + Response, 3) Healing
<b>a) vv.12-13 Ten Lepers At A Distance (Take Initiative!).</b>		// 5:12-16, 4:27; 2 Kings 5:1-19 (Naaman)
		Common Misery, Range Of Skin Diseases, 4:5 Miracles In Journey
12	And as he entered a village, he was met by <b>ten leprous men</b> ,	2 Kgs. 7:3 (groups), Skin Disease, Samaritan or Jewish?
	who stood at a distance	Observed Regulations, <i>m. Neg.</i> 3:1, 5:12-14, Stay Outside Camp: Numbers 5:2-3
13	and lifted up their voices and said,	Approachable Jesus, Unison Prayer, Required To Warn Others: Lev. 13:45-46
Faith 1: Prayer	"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." (Desire alms? \$)	Benefaction, On Mercy, See 16:24, 18:38-39, 1:50, 54, 72, 78
		Ps. 123:3, More Than Asked For, They Had Heard Of Him (Lk. 4:14)
<b>b) v.14a Jesus' Healing Command From A Distance.</b>		5:25, 6:10, 7:14, 8:54 (Commands)
		Shows Jesus' Trust, Both Public Health & Religious Function
14	When he <i>saw</i> them he said to them,	10:24, Illumination Of Holy Spirit, <i>Saw</i> = More Than Mere Sight
Command	"Go and show yourselves to the priests...."	Promise? Lev. 13:3, 10, 13; 14:1-32 (Priest + Temple Sacrifice)
		Act With Mercy, Test Of Faith (2 Kgs. 5:10-15)? They Understood What This Meant
<b>b') v.14b Their Obedience To His Command.</b>		Blend Of Knowledge/ Ignorance
Faith 2:		No Confession Of Sin Required
Obedience	And as they went	Act Of Mass Trust/Obedience/Hope
<b>a') v.14c Result: Their Healing At Distance.</b>		At A Distance, Difficult// Raising The Dead, Defilement Removed
		The Order Is 1) Prayer, 2) Command, 3) Obedience, 4) Healing, 5) Thanksgiving
Cured	<b>they were cleansed.</b>	<i>p.v.</i> = by God, 4:27, 5:12-16, 7:22, Two Part Story // 2 Kgs. 5 = OT Conversion Of A Foreigner
Healing		
<b>c) vv.15-16 One Leper Up Close.</b>		Up Close: No Longer At A Distance, Eyes Of Faith Opened
		Luke On Faith Of Foreigners, 7:9, 10:25-37, Acts 10-11
15	Then one of them, when he <i>saw</i> that <b>he was healed</b> , turned back,	<i>p.v.</i> , <i>Sees Kingdom</i> , How Does His Sight Differ?
	<i>praising God</i> with a loud voice;	5:25-26, 7:16, 13:13, 18:43, Acts 14:21
16	and he <b>fell on his face</b> at Jesus' feet,	Jesus Is The True Priest! True Temple!
Faith 3: Thanks	<i>giving him thanks</i> (Gk. = <i>eucharistein</i> ).	Implicit Christology = Jesus Is The Divine Agent, 5:12
<b>d) v.16b Identity Issue: A Samaritan.</b>		2 Levels Of Separation: Leper, Samaritan
		Samaria 9:52, 10:33, 17:1, Acts 1:8, 8:1, 1-14, 25, 9:31, 15:3
Now he was <i>a Samaritan!</i> (Implying that the other nine were Jews.)		10:33, Punch Line (half-breed, heretic)
		Seeing The Kingdom In Jesus Is What Saves
<b>d') vv.17-18 Identity Issue: This Foreigner, Three Questions Up Close.</b>		Foreign Outcast Is The Only One Who Sees
17	Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed?"	Yes! Supernatural Faith, Jesus Was Certain!
	Where are the nine?	Missed The Deepest Meaning! Jos. <i>Ant.</i> 15.11.5
18	Was no one found to return and give praise to God except <i>this foreigner?</i> "	Ps. 30:10-20, Lk. 4:27, 7:9
		Fallen → Ill → Encounter → Cure → Insight, → Saved
<b>c') v.19 Results: Salvation Up Close, A New Relationship, New Life.</b>		Healing Alone Does Not Save
		Later Church Mission To Samaritans: Acts 8:5, 11:18
19	And he said to him,	He Got It! Wholeness, Sees God's Gift In Jesus, Responds Appropriately
Faith 4:	" <b>Rise</b> and <b>go your way</b> ;" (back to community)	Resurrection And New Life
Restoration	your faith <b>has saved you</b> " ( <i>Sesoken se</i> = made you well).	7:50, 8:48, 17:19, 18:42, Healed Relationship, Outsider

(L + Q) KINGDOM INSIGHT DIALOG (3)

<b>3) 17:20-21 THE MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM IN JESUS.</b>		Pronouncement Story
20	Being asked by the Pharisees <i>when</i> the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them,	Leper Sees, They Don't
a(-)	" <u>The kingdom of God</u> /is not coming with signs to be observed;	Expectations = 1 Enoch 91, 93; 2 Baruch 53-74
21	b nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!'	// Mk. 13:21, Mt. 24:23, Redirects Them From Future To Present, G.T. 3
	b' or 'There!'	Rejects Apocalyptic Speculation, Jesus Disallowed All Calculations
a'(+)	for behold (Look!), <u>the kingdom of God</u> /is in the midst of you."	Healing As A Sign, 4:18-19, 3:22, 7:20-22, 11:20, Blind To It?

### A Brief Treatment Of Luke 17:11-19, 20-21

The next thought unit is 17:11-19 and falls into two parts: 1) 17:11, a travel report, and 2) vv.12-19, the healing of ten and return of one. This is one of five miracles with the larger journey (11:14, 13:12, 14:4, 17:14, 18:35) demonstrating that healing was a permanent and not transient feature of Jesus' work. The purpose of the travel report is two fold. It reminds hearers where the journey is headed (i.e. to Jerusalem and Jesus' death) and it shows Jesus on the border between Samaritan and Jewish territory with the word *Samaria* found both in the travel report (v.11) and as a surprise within the story (v.16b). While the journey as a whole is oriented on a north-to-south axis, this movement is likely east-to-west, and no more precision is possible. Luke's reports is as much theological and missiological as geographic.

\_\_\_\_\_The story of Jesus healing ten lepers at a distance falls into two parallel parts (vv.12-14, vv.15-19); each has the same 4:2 concentric structure (a-b//b'-a'). The healing of the ten opens with a description of "ten leprous men" (v.12a) and closes with a report of the cure, "they were cleansed (v.14c)." The story of the one who returned is bracketed by the terms *he was healed* (v.15a) and *has saved you* (v.19). Full restoration includes *cleansing, healing, and being saved* or restored to relationship with God. Jesus brings wholeness on several axes: with others, with the self, with God. At the center of vv.12-14 is the contrast between Jesus command (v.14a) and their obedience (v.14b). At the center of vv.15-19 is the surprise that the one who returned is a *Samaritan* (v.16b), thus *a foreigner* (v.18). The word *saw* is found in both parts (v.14a//v.15a) and indicates the sight of divine revelation. Jesus *saw* what God wanted to do and obeyed; the Samaritan *saw* Jesus was God's agent and returned to praise. Besides the three varied terms for healing, there is an unfolding of the concept of faith from *faith as prayer* (v.13) to *faith as obedience* (v.14b), to *faith as worship* (vv.15-16) to *faith as salvation* (v.19). Faith and healing are not static but dynamic, multi-layered realities enabled by God's gracious initiative in Jesus. Faith is essentially responsive.

As Jesus and company approach an unnamed village he is faced by a band of ten lepers who, according to Leviticus 13-14, must observe certain protocols: live outside the camp, remain at a distance, announce their presence. The leprosy of which Luke speaks is not to be equated with Hansen's disease but includes a variety of skin lesions which call for quarantine and render one ritually unclean, the common verdict being this was God's judgment. They had heard of Jesus mercy to lepers and with one voice gave him a title (*Master*), and asked for mercy. As beggars they often received money or food from this request, but the intent here is for more. What Jesus does next is odd. Should such a skin condition abate, a leper was required to undergo a careful inspection by a priest which then led to several temple offerings, and only then was the sufferer declared *clean* and restored to community. But Jesus, by the Spirit's revelation, did not touch them as before (5:12-16) but commanded them to present themselves as a group to the local priests as if already cleansed. It's a test of obedience, and as they go as a group they are all healed on the way. The Holy Spirit meets their obedience with healing power. It is a creative miracle of rapidly removing a skin disease. Jesus obeys; they obey; a wonder happens. The nine continue on the way to the village priest since he is the pathway to official restoration and the lifting of the stigma. The story might have stopped here, but there was a second work of the Spirit to which only one responded. When he looked at his new skin, the Samaritan returned and offered Jesus divine honors. Not only his skin but also his perceptions were cleansed: *he now saw*. That he is a religious outsider is now revealed. In his presence Jesus gives the indirect praise of three rhetorical questions (vv.17-18). The implication of v.18 is that to praise Jesus is to praise God, a high Christology! In Jesus we meet God ontologically. The fullness of faith is to press through to a restored relationship with God (v.19). He is then sent back to his old life as a new man. The effects of the kingdom of God are not just the cosmic signs at the end but the healings that were a daily occurrence for Jesus. The early signs of the kingdom are already here in our midst. Do we see?

## A STEP BEYOND HEALING

*“You faith has saved you.”*

The living link of response and trust that opens to receive from God.

LUKE 17:19b

Since Pastor Phil had a challenging week, he invited me to speak with you today. I am not a make-believe character but a real man. Let’s call me Jacob. Did you know that there are still a few hundred of us Samaritans still worshipping atop of Mount Gerazim?<sup>1</sup> One day I hope we meet each other in the flesh (resurrected flesh of course!) because I am your brother in Christ. I am family you haven’t met yet, and I want you to know something of my story. You will then see why Jesus is so dear to me, not just because I now see him face-to-face but because of the day he crossed my path outside the village. Some would call it a happenstance, an accident; I call it a *divine appointment*. He drew a circle of healing that included me and invited me back into community, and he gave me a new relationship with our heavenly Father. He also gave me back my future. My problem was skin deep, but the cure went clear to the bone. In a strange way I’m even thankful for the years of leprosy. If I never had the disease, I might never have met the man. No one wants misery, but it can be the occasion for new life when looked back on with the eyes of faith.

*Half-breed* and *heretic* is what our Jewish cousins to the north and south called us for over half a millennium.<sup>2</sup> *Samaritan* was a curse word and oath, roughly equal in your world to *sex-offender* and *traitor* and *heretic* and *druggie* all rolled into one ugly ball and hurled in hatred.<sup>3</sup> We were despised, but that’s not how we saw

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<sup>1</sup> [www.livius.org/people/samaritans](http://www.livius.org/people/samaritans). “In 1948, there were exactly 250 Samaritans (192 in Nablus and 58 in Tell Aviv). In 2003, the community consisted of 656 people, of which 346 were living in Holon, and 310 near Mount Gerizim.”

<sup>2</sup> See the map at the end of the manuscript, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> John 8:48.

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ourselves. We considered our group to be members of an old religion, Judaism as it used to be before corrupted by Eli the priest who set up an altar on another mountain and later by Ezra and Hillel. We follow only the first five books of Moses and do not worship in their holy city of Jerusalem but atop our Mt. Gerazim where sacrifice is still carried out by our priests. We are decedents of the patriarch Joseph and they of Judah. Jews avoided us like the plague; contact rendered them ceremonially unclean just as if they'd touched a pagan Gentile. They thought we were full of demons. We were aliens but also physical and spiritual cousins. People are like that about their traditions, particularly when intertwined with their religion. Occasionally there was violence between us but mainly name calling and mutual avoidance. But since Samaria stands between Jewish Galilee to the north and Jewish Judah to the south we have to deal with each other, like living next door to a brother-in-law you can't stand.

Life was good until the scales first appeared on my skin. Married, kids, a place in life- even if small and simple by your standards. Oh for the joy of common blessings. Village greetings. Friends. Waking up with a woman you love beside you. Children to be taught the Torah, a trade and our traditions. Bread and wine, laughter around a table. A sense of belonging. Skin that is smooth to the touch. The dream of growing old surrounded by grandchildren. It all ended in less than a month.

At first I tried to hide it with a longer robe and cuffs, but it could not be hidden after it spread like a stream down a hillside. It was leprosy, a term we use for a range of skin disorders, but not what you know as Hansen's disease.<sup>4</sup> Skin conditions caused such fear among us since they distorted the most basic boundary between people- their skin, something like your fear of AIDs, or your more-recent fears of receiving ebola patients, even your own missionaries. Since some were communicable and others not, all were banished since we did not have the advantage of your later medical insights or treatments. I was now a danger. So I was banished, permanently quarantined by the priests who served as our public health inspectors. Leviticus is a book we share with the Jews, and in it the separation of lepers is strictly regulated.<sup>5</sup> I was now ritually unclean, unfit for the worship of God.

My identity changed. I was no longer a man but a category. Not a man with leprosy but *a leper*- a label. I quickly moved from one status to another: from being

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<sup>4</sup> David Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 211), 238-239.

<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 13-14.

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at the center to being at the margins, from touched to untouchable, from walking among the living to living among the living dead.<sup>6</sup> People in the village it was punishment from God for some sin and that the appearance of my skin was a reflection of the disease of my soul.<sup>7</sup> I felt ugly and ashamed.

My wife and children were confused. “What happened to pappa? Is he really what the people say? Is he a dead man? No one will play with us any more.” I remember the first time I reached out and she recoiled. It was the beginning of the end before it all went public. Her back to me at night. Careful washing of all my clothes. Keeping the children at a distance. Separate bowls for eating. How cruel it all was. I do not blame her now, or then. Her life ended as well as mine.

The elders and priests came to my house, took me into the daylight for inspection and passed the verdict, “Leprosy.” It was like having your picture posted in the Post Office. Not even the courtesy of a goodbye hug; I was placed under a ban and threatened if I approached the village or came within the prescribed distance to another person. I now lived among the ones I so long despised. The irony of it is that the other nine in our little band of outcasts were all Jews. We were driven together by a common disease. But even here I was a Samaritan. How laughable for a Jewish leper to say to a Samaritan, “At least we’re Jews.” Even here, at the bottom of the ladder, status games are vicious. We begged from passers by. Some tossed coins or scraps of bread and meat, but they never looked at us.

Our village is on the northeastern border of Samaria, only a stone’s throw from Galilee. That’s how a Samaritan ended up in a Jewish colony. I prayed to die. I prayed for healing. I remembered Scripture. I was angry, then depressed, then angry again. Once at night I sneaked back to look through the window at my sleeping wife and children, but only once. The boys and my only daughter were so much bigger now. What right did I have to drag them through misery again? Inside I knew that I was the same man I’d always been, but this bag of corrupted skin put a impenetrable barrier between me and my old world. Such things drive a man mad. What kept me alive I did not know. I do now; I was kept alive for a divine encounter.

I’m no saint, mind you, but for all those nights when I reviewed my life I could

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<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 3.11.3 para. 264 likens the curing a leper to raising the dead.

<sup>7</sup> Lev. 14:24, Num. 12:1-13, Dt. 24:8-9, 28:27, 2 Sam. 3:29, 2 Kgs. 5:20-27, 15:5, 2 Chron 26:20.

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find no transgression worthy of such horrible punishment. Maybe it wasn't an action of mine. Maybe it was fate or some cruel joke or just the way things are in a world full of sin and evil and death. How many times I wish I'd died, especially in the early days when the loss of family was so keen. I wept and wept till the tears dried up, and then I just tried to survive day by day with the nine others who formed our despised little colony of outcasts. Some were kind enough to bring bread and water and few vegetables left over in the market. They knew where we were, and we knew when they came, but we never met. It was one of the unwritten rules. It was their religious duty, but how hard it is to be the object of someones duty to God. You eating their scraps, them scoring points with conscience. It was an ugly, hopeless life.

One thing you learn is to watch for approaching dust clouds. And if you watch the shape of the cloud, whether it arises quickly or slowly, you can tell if the people are on foot or horseback. One learns to stay out of the way of horses; it's much easier to tug on the hearts of those who walk by on foot. More time to pierce the conscience. I was good at it, so good that the other nine often stole my alms with the words, "Help us. We are Jews like you and not a Samaritan like him." When survival is a necessity, begging is an art. Pilgrimage seasons were the best though. On their way to the Jerusalem temple the Galileans are especially generous, kind of like you Christians at Christmas with the bell-ringers and black kettles. Three times a year we ate and drank well. For a little while the wine took away the pain, but then the skins ran dry and water from a spring was the best we could do. Why not get drunk when you can? What's a leper got to lose? Desperation is the death of self-control.

You might think in our isolation we'd lose touch with what was going on in the wider world. But if you've even been in a prison, you know it's not true. News reached us that up in the Galilee a prophet had arisen, one Jesus of Nazareth. Crazy Jews! That was my response until I heard he was a man of spiritual power who touched and cured lepers like us.<sup>8</sup> What was *in him* was stronger than what *was on* us, and I am told he never required a leper to first make a confession of sin. I tell you it's easy to make fun of the religion of others until it touches where you hurt.

It would never do for us to go find him. What chance does a pack of traveling lepers have? Our only chance was that one day he might pass our way. Hope is a powerful force, second only to love perhaps. The possibility of a new future is seductive; it does something to the soul. It makes you say strange things to yourself,

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<sup>8</sup> 5:12-16, 7:22.

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like *if only* and *maybe tomorrow*. We even practiced a group prayer if ever he came our way. We knew his name, *Jesus*, gave him an exalted title, *Master*, then begged for all he might give us, *have mercy on us*, not *me* but *us*. All for one and one for all! You wake up with anticipation instead of dread. If the stories were true and even one leper healed, then why not all of us? Your blind hymn-writer Fanny Crosby voiced our hope, “Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry. While on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.” Her locked in the dark, us in isolation.

One fine spring day three weeks before Passover it happened.<sup>9</sup> It was a large crowd, but they were too early for the regular Pilgrim traffic. Lots of them, men and women, and at the head of the pack a man who talked as he walked. From behind my bush I heard his name, *Jesus*. Was this the one they had been talking about, or was I dreaming? After all, *Jesus* is such a common name. And since we stood between him and the village he would have to hear us. “It’s him. It’s Jesus.” Our voices went up like an off-key chorus, first two of us, then five, then all in unison, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us, have mercy on us.” It was the lament of the lepers, the cry of the zombies. Desperate men do not pray long, elaborate prayers. We were loud, nine Jews and one Samaritan, united in prayer.

Jesus heard us, and when he stopped they all stopped. By the turn of their heads from front to back you knew what they were whispering back through the ranks, “Lepers, lepers.” They waited to see what Jesus would do. He looked at us without saying anything. And since we had his attention, we ceased our shouting. What was the use? We’d gotten what we wanted- his gaze; it was now up to him. We heard he touched lepers and hoped he would touch us, but we were not going to approach him any closer. What if his fellow travelers turned on us? Some of us carried bruises and scars from too-close encounters with non-lepers.

When he finally spoke I remember thinking, “He skipped a step! You go to the priests only *after* the symptoms have vanished, not before.” But when he spoke something within me said a Yes that was deeper than logic. The hope that was in me was moving and changing, almost as if hope was attaching itself to something more

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<sup>9</sup> Exegetical articles include, Mark Allan Powell, “Salvation in Luke-Acts,” *Word & World*, Vol. XII, No. 1, Winter 1992, 5-10; Dennis Hamm, “What the Samaritan Leper Sees: The Narrative Christology Of Luke 17:11-19,” *CBQ* 56, 1994, 273-287; Frederick Gaiser, ‘Your Faith Has Made You Well’: Healing And Salvation in Luke 17:12-19,” *Word & World*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, Summer 1996, 291-301; John T. Carroll, “Luke 17:11-19,” *Interpretation* , 405-408.

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real than wishful dreams and in the process becoming more substantial, something like faith as knowledge. Hope has found a worthy object.

Let me warn you that healing is always a surprise. It never comes packaged as you expected. God resists being put in a box and reduced to a method or a technique or a program. Our reports were that Jesus had *touched lepers* and that his touch in effect wiped away the leprosy as you mop a dirty floor or clean a bug-encrusted windshield. They didn't make him unclean; he made them clean and whole. Leper's didn't contaminate him; he uncontaminated them. That's what we expected. That he would touch each of us in turn, and our skin would be as smooth as a baby's bottom. But there was no touch of his hand to our skin, only the touch of his voice on our eardrums. It was a sacramental word, not a sacramental touch. Faith came to us by hearing, and hearing by a word from Jesus. He cupped his hands and shouted, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." Was it a joke? Was he mocking us, or was there something more? Had he heard from God above to say those strange words, or was he just getting rid of us to continue his travel uninterrupted? It was a test of our obedience, and what do desperate men do?

I do not know how the birds do it. Have you seen them? A flock in flight, and then they turn, all at the same time. It's what we did en masse. We all turned and headed to the nearest priest. I thought to myself, "How odd of me, a Samaritan, to be headed off to a Jewish priest!" But we all obeyed. Maybe whatever power spoke to him gave us the command but did not reveal my identity. Who knows?

There was a momentum about our joint obedience. Sustained by hope and now propelled by a word, we did not speak but drove on, I was not the first to notice, though I was the first to shout. My hands and arms were still dark from the sun, but the scales were gone. I'd seen snakes shed their skins, but now I felt as if that is what was done to me, like I had been scraped and given a fresh coat of white wash. I won't repeat what one man said (it was a mild profanity), but I am told it is a phrase often repeated on flight data recorders when your jet planes are going down. But in his mouth it was pure praise. I had walked through an invisible door into a new world.

One man took all his clothes off right there in the road, stripped naked and ran around laughing. "It's all gone! All gone! Look at me! I knew there was a God. In fact, I prayed every day in secret. Never told you men, but I prayed every day."

"Why, I'll be damned," one of the Jews said as he looked at me. "What do you know? God even loves sorry Samaritans." He smiled, then we all cried. Out of sight

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of Jesus. Not yet to the priests. Standing there in the road weeping at the mercy and wonder of it all. Ten of us cleansed. Back to home. Back to family. Back to synagogue. Back to working and tithing and straight living. Back to the sweet goodness of a simple life.

I stood there as they walked off; I never saw them again. They went back to the Jewish side of the cultural barrier, got their public health exam, and vanished. “I have been obedient to his command,” I said to myself, “even thankful, but not yet grateful.” So while they went on I went back. And the closer I got to Jesus the louder my voice, “Praise God. Praise the God of Moses who has visited his people. Praise his prophet Jesus. Hallelujah.” If you Methodists think the Pentecostals get out-of-control-happy, you should have seen me! As your youth say, “I was wired.” It’s almost more than a man can stand. I was drunk with joy and wondered if I was dreaming. To wake up one morning a leper and that same day to be a whole man again. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

I was once a proud man, then a frightened man, then a hated man, but now it felt so right to be a humble man. I threw myself at his feet. He didn’t say a word as long as I was speaking and sobbing and laughing. He listened to my gushings as if I was the only man in the world. After all these years I can tell you the style of his sandals, the color of dust on his feet and the shape of his ten toenails. They are imprinted on my mind’s eye. If God had feet, they looked like these. I dared not move lest the bubble pop and the dream vanish. A quietness came over me, and I remember thinking, “I need some new clothes before I go home. How old will the boys be now? What will the years have done to Huldah my wife?”

I heard him say it. Was it my accent that gave me away? Or did he know through some other means? “Behold,” he said with a grand wave of his hand, “a Samaritan.” But there was no hard edge in his voice. It felt like a blessing instead of a label. Almost dignified, and that from a Jewish prophet and healer!

He was no longer facing me now. I saw his feet turn to face his followers. Still I did not move from my prostration. How does one stand in the presence of one who speaks and acts for God? Later I would learn to call this what it was, *a teachable moment*. His questions were three. “Were not ten cleansed?” Yes. “Where are the nine?” Not here. “Was no one found to return and give praise to God except *this foreigner*?” That’s me! It felt like a second blessing. He was praising me in front of them! Using me as exhibit A of God’s surprising grace for outsiders as a sign of the new world, the kingdom.

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His words to me were simple and direct. I was not invited to join his company. No way for a Samaritan to be a part of a trip to Jerusalem, at least not yet. Where once he looked at me from the proper distance for a leper, now it was eye to eye, “Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.”

Why me? Not the healing but the second part? We all were healed. Then why did I alone turn back? I’m not a better man than they. And now that I think of it, they only received half the blessing, the part most people want, the physical relief part. But I got more. I got the Giver, not just the gift. He looked me in the eye. He blessed me. I can tell you what salvation is, and it is more than physical healing. It’s a healed relationship with God through Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Don’t get me wrong. I’m thankful the leprosy is gone, but I feel sorry for the others. They don’t know what it’s like with him *up close*. They don’t know what it’s like for your insides to be as clean as your outsides. They had the faith of hope and the faith of prayer and the faith of obedience, but when I turned around and went back I found that I had the faith of gratitude and the faith of worship. I saw that I was healed, then in a flash I saw who he was. He was the priest of God. He was the new temple of God. He was the living preview of the kingdom of God, the great physician.

If theology is reflection on religious experience, then I Jacob, a former leper, am a theologian. What our later thinkers said about him, things like *the Word become flesh* and *the incarnation* or *all the God that could fit in a man* I agree with, not because I reasoned myself to it but because it’s the only language that does justice to who I experienced him to be.

Luke was subtle when he retold my story. He put the phrases *praising God* and *giving him* (i.e. Jesus) *thanks* in parallel to make a point. Insiders understood what he was implying. To praise Jesus is to praise God, and to fall at his feet is to humble yourself before the Almighty. Prayer is on your feet in prayer and on your feet in obedience and on your face in thanksgiving and on your feet looking into the eyes of one whose full mystery of love cannot be contained in any other than God language. It’s rude and shortsighted to take his gifts and run; he deserves our thanks. And what he did for my skin, he can do for your soul. Being unclean is more than an outward thing. Sin makes us all lepers inwardly, our souls full of sores and endless

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<sup>10</sup> On salvation, see Charles Talbert and Jason A. Whitlock, editors, *Getting Saved: The Whole Story Of Salvation In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

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itching we cannot heal.

Have you ever lain in bed with a grin and tears running down into your ears? That was me for weeks. I walked into town with my shirt off so everyone could see. And when I walked into my home, you'd have thought they saw a ghost. We wept and laughed together, only it was sweeter than ever before. I know what it is to be saved. I know what it is to savor every moment of life as a divine gift. And I am not afraid of death. I've already been there, and I know that this man, the one they call Jesus, is bigger than all that afflicts us, even death. To meet him is find life that will not quit. Something else will kill me, but I tell you this: it will not be leprosy.

Do you know how sweet an orange tastes? Or a kiss? Or how wonderful it is the first time you see whiskers sprout on your sin's chin. I told everyone about my miracle. It made some of them mad that he was a Jew, but what could they say? You cannot get near this man without having your prejudices rearranged. A few years later when some of the apostles came to Samaria they were surprised to find that one village, mine, already knew part of the Jesus story.<sup>11</sup> I tell you this one thing I know. Jesus breaks down barriers with love that can only come from God. Mercy and compassion are never out of style. I leave you with words of Pastor Rich Hansen:

"God's reality in our world is like gently falling rain. We each have a bowl in our hearts and minds in which we can easily catch God's reality- if we just hold it before us. But it makes all the difference in the world whether our bowl is turned upwards- or downwards."<sup>12</sup>

Thank you for hearing my story, and thanks to Pastor Phil for letting me fill the pulpit today. He will be back next week. Shalom!

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 8.

<sup>12</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Luke 17:11-21.

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**An Old Testament Precedent**

	<b>Jesus And The Ten Lepers: Luke 17:11-19</b>	<b>Elijah And Naaman The Syrian 2 Kings 5:1-19</b>
Prophet	Jesus	Elijah
Lepers	9 Jews, 1 Samaritan (foreigner)	1 Syrian General Naaman (foreigner)
Location	Samaria	Samaria
Command	“Go and show yourself....”	Go, wash in the Jordan seven times....”
Faith	Obedience before healing	Obedience before healing
Communication	From a distance	From a distance
Cleansing	At a distance after a delay	At a distance after delay
Return	Yes	Yes
Divine praise from one healed	Yes	Yes

**Levels Of Faith In Luke 17:11-19**

1. Some level of Samaritan faith prior to banning for leprosy: heritage/practice
  2. Faith to organize with others lepers and offer a unison prayer: planning
  3. Faith to voice it together: concerted action in the face of opportunity
  4. Faith to obey Jesus’ word and his implications: obedience with hope
  5. Faith to see who was operating through Jesus and return: repentance and worship
  6. Faith to research and record the story in your biography of Jesus: Luke
  7. Faith to love and pray for the outcasts in our day: each of us.
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**AN INTRODUCTION TO HEALING SERVICES AND PRAYERS**  
(Taken from *The United Methodist Book of Worship [1989], 613-615*)

Scripture strongly affirms ministries of spiritual healing, which in recent years have received renewed emphasis throughout Christ's holy Church. The root of the word healing in New Testament Greek, *sozo*, is the same as that of salvation and wholeness. Spiritual healing is God's work of offering persons balance, harmony, and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through such healing, God works to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity, among individuals and communities, within each person, and between humanity and the rest of creation. The New Testament records that Jesus himself healed the estranged and sick and sent out his disciples on ministries of healing. James (5:14-16a) calls us also to pray for and anoint the sick, that they may be healed.

All healing is of God. The Church's healing ministry in no way detracts from the gifts God gives through medicine and psychotherapy. It is no substitute for either medicine or the proper care of one's health. Rather, it adds to our total resources for wholeness. Healing is not magic, but underlying it is the great mystery of God's love. Those who minister spiritual healing are channels of God's love. Although no one can predict what will happen in a given instance, many marvelous healings have taken place.

God does not promise that we shall be spared suffering but does promise to be with us in our suffering. Trusting that promise, we are enabled to recognize God's sustaining presence in pain, sickness, injury, and estrangement. Likewise, God does not promise that we will be cured of all illnesses; and we all must face the inevitability of death. A Service of Healing is not necessarily a service of curing, but it provides an atmosphere in which healing can happen. The greatest healing of all is the reunion or reconciliation of a human being with God. When this happens, physical healing sometimes occurs, mental and emotional balance is often restored, spiritual health is enhanced, and relationships are healed. For the Christian the basic purpose of spiritual healing is to renew and strengthen one's relationship with the living Christ.

Patterns of healing services grow out of both Church traditions and the needs of the moment. Prayers for healing, accompanied if desired by anointing with the laying on of hands, may be incorporated into any service of congregational worship as a Response to the Word. Also, there may be a healing service at a stated time each week or month, or healing may be ministered privately to individuals. Many find not only prayer but also Holy Communion, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil to be healing.

Laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and the less formal gesture of holding someone's hand all show the power of touch, which plays a central role in the healings recorded in the New Testament. Jesus often touched others--blessing children, washing feet, healing injuries or disease, and raising people from death. Biblical precedent combines with our natural desire to reach out to persons in need in prompting us to touch gently and lovingly those who ask for healing prayers. Such an act is a tangible expression of the presence of the healing Christ, working in and through those who minister in his name.

Anointing the forehead with oil is a sign act invoking the healing love of God. The oil points beyond itself and those doing the anointing to the action of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the healing Christ, who is God's Anointed One. Olive oil is traditionally used in anointing but can become rancid. Sweet oil, which is olive oil with a preservative, is available in any pharmacy. Fragrant oils may be used, but care must be taken because some people are allergic to perfumes.... It is important that those ministering in services of healing be sensitive to the differences that exist among those who come for healing ministries. Sound preaching, teaching, and pastoral care are essential for healing ministries to accomplish their purpose.

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Palestine In The Time Of Jesus (33AD)

