

Because of the small, white spots on his eyelids and hands the man had thought something might be wrong. His visit to the priest had not gone well. His diagnosis was hardly what he had hoped to hear.

From now on anything he touched would be unclean. Fear of infecting his family and friends would keep him from their sides. For that matter, he was not allowed to get within six feet of anyone... unless that 'anyone' was also a leper. If anyone gave some sign of wanting to break that six-foot barrier, he had to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" No longer could he go to the temple to make a sacrifice; no longer could he work for a living. He would also begin to lose the sensation of pain. Without the ability to feel pain, there would be no way for him to gauge what was happening to his body. A bone could be broken and he would not know. A scratch could become an infected wound, and he would not realize. "Maybe," the man thought, "maybe the people are right. Maybe this disease is a Divine curse for some great sin I have committed." How else could he explain the dreadful destruction which was coming to his body, the desolation which already had taken hold of his soul?

And so it was, the man found himself in the company of nine others who understood his situation because they were suffering as he was suffering. Together they lived outside a village in the borderland between Galilee and Samaria. There at the gates of the community they kept their prescribed distance from healthier, happier folk who were coming and going into town. There they hoped someone might take pity on them and share a bit of food, a little charity, and most importantly, news of what was going on in the regular world.

I wonder what news these ten had heard about Jesus. Had they been told of how He had healed so many at Capernaum? Whatever they had heard, the day came when they got word that Jesus was headed their way. They decided they would call out to Jesus from a distance and they would not be specific in their request. They would call out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," and then let Him decide what form His mercy would take.

This they did, and without conversation or much interaction, Jesus simply told them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests who gave you your diagnosis. Show yourself to the men who can give you a clean bill of health."

It is to the credit of the lepers that they immediately started out toward Jerusalem, the temple, and a new verdict on their future. Scripture doesn't tell us how many miles they had walked, how much time had ticked by before they realized they had been made well. Without the ability to see their own faces the revelation came when they looked at each other.

The white scales were gone, the thickening of the facial features was gone; the fingers and toes were back. They had been healed! And that left these men who had been given a new lease on life with a decision to make. They could, as they had been instructed by Jesus Himself, continue on the path to the priests in Jerusalem. There they would hear that not only had their bodies been restored, so had their past lives. On that path was a reunion with family and friends, wife and children. On that path was the ability to return home and go back to work and live out their lives in happiness.

And the other path... the other path would take them back to Jesus so they might give Him thanks for the miracle He had done. Each of the healed lepers had a choice. Go to the temple, see the priest, and then what? No doubt when they got home, they were instantly immersed in picking up their own lives. The longer they stayed at home, the easier it was to put their thanks to Jesus on the back burner. They wanted to thank Him, they intended to thank Him, but somehow life got in the way and they never got around to making the trip or saying the words.

Except for one; one who was a double outcast. He'd been a leper and a Samaritan. That meant twice the isolation. But there had been something about Jesus and this healing He had brought. Clearly it was a miracle, which meant a new lease on life for each of the lepers, but there was more to it. This Jesus, about whom they had heard so much, did not seem bothered in the least by their status as those unclean. He couldn't tell for sure, but it was almost like Jesus had taken their uncleanness and filthy disease upon himself. Could that have been right? The former leper couldn't be sure. All He knew was that Jesus was responsible for his restoration, and he needed to say "thank you." He had received a priceless gift—his whole life rebooted—but now he wanted to receive the Giver. Yes, he had been a leper, and he was still a foreigner, and it hadn't mattered. Jesus still gave to him. What else might this Jesus have to give?

My friends, the Jesus who gave to the leper is the same Jesus who gives to you today. He is not bothered in the least by your unclean heart or the filth of any past thought, word, or deed. He has indeed taken the disease of our sin upon himself; and taken it all the way to the cross and buried it in His tomb. This Jesus rose from the dead, completely renewed, so that your life and mine might likewise be rebooted and a life with God restored beginning now and lasting forever. These are priceless gifts, bought and paid for by the innocent suffering and death of Jesus. Celebrate them. Thank God for them. And take the path that leads you back to the Giver.

