

Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Divine

Newgate Street

St. John's, Antigua

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 23 (C)

October 13, 2019

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have

mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not 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?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Dear Lord, May we return to give you thanks. Amen.

Paul Duke, a Baptist pastor in Kirkwood, Missouri, wrote, “The Word [of God] doesn’t heal us; it commands [us to go] down a path to where healing overtakes us.” The ten lepers in today’s gospel lesson were not healed when they encountered Jesus, but their healing occurred as they went down the road to get verification of their healings by the Temple priests. Indeed it is as we begin to act on healing advice that our healing begins to occur. One can see many who know just what it will take to find healing, but they resist doing it. It may be eating less saturated fats, or stopping smoking, drinking, or taking drugs, or simply going to

one's doctor. But even in the face of knowing what will give them healing, many will aver and go the other way, the way away from God's healing.

Dr. Carl Simonton, a cancer doctor in California with thirty years of practice in cancer radiation therapy, has observed seven critical things that people with life-threatening diseases can do to enhance the length and quality of their life. First, is to decide to get well. Many simply do not take this very important step. And I have observed some who simply do not really want to find healing. They have somehow mentally or emotionally adapted to suffering

and seem to have no spark of hope for their healing. But deciding to get well is a requisite first step to getting well. Second is being open to who you are. Use the wisdom that resides with you and around you. Read and talk to people about healing, and educate yourself about your disease or injury as much as you can. Thirdly, develop a trust in God, in others, and in yourself. Healing can come from a variety of avenues, and God can use any one of them. Having faith that one's healing can occur is important. Fourth is to ask for help and be accepting of health wherever and however it may come. Be open to new sources of assistance and

new cures. More and more doctors are turning to alternative healing methods to compliment prescription drugs and standard medical procedures. I have noted that twenty years ago acupuncture was frowned on by most in the medical community. But today it is practiced in nearly every major medical center in the US. Fifth is to be honest in feelings and acknowledge our own emotions in order to maintain our integrity. Denial is still the leading cause of death in the world. Be in touch with what is going on inside of your body and mind. Waiting too long to seek help often is the result of not being honest with what one is really

feeling--the shortness of breath, the mysterious lump, the usual or unusual pain. Don't deny what you are really feeling. Six: hold on to uplifting thoughts, mentally and emotionally, and visualize your well-being. Staying depressed only serves to drain one's energy and healing capacity. But seeing in the mind's eye the accomplishment of one's healing is a great first step to actually getting that much hoped for healing. And seven, live creatively, developing the attitude of loving and alive curiosity. Don't stay stuck in the past. Live for the now and the future.

As a wise observer has noted, God has two dwelling places; one is in heaven, and the other is in a thankful heart.

The famous eighteenth century Anglican theologian William Law around the time of the founding of St. John's Cathedral here wrote, "The greatest saint in the world is not the one who prays the most, or fasts, [goes without eating,] the most. It is not the one who gives the most alms, [money,] or is most well-known in temperance, chastity [or purity of life], or justice, but [the greatest saint in the world is] the one who is always thankful to God, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness and has a

heart always ready to praise God for [God's goodness].

Episcopal writer H. K. Oehmig has written, "Gratitude buoys [and raises] the spirit like nothing else."

Albert Einstein summed it up: "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. Whoever can no longer wonder, [whoever can no longer] marvel, is as good as dead."

Those ten lepers came to the right person, Jesus, to find healing. But only one came back to acknowledge God's hand in their healing.

We prayed every week for the immigrant detainees in Elizabeth's Homeland Security non-criminal detention center when they came up for hearings for their case. Our Bible study group there included several non-Christians from time to time, but we pray with and for them just as though they were Christians. We think everyone needs prayers. One day as we were going into the detention center for the service one Hindu man was coming out into freedom. He thanked us profusely for praying for him while he was there and attributed his release to our prayers. I saw first hand the situation Jesus describes. No Christian in nearly four

years had ever told us they were grateful for our prayers except this Hindu. And in my heart I asked, ‘Where are the others?’

The disease referred to in our gospel lesson for today has been identified as not being Hanson’s Disease leprosy by archeologists who have not found any evidence of that type of leprosy in human bones from first century Israel. The conditions referred to in the Old Testament as leprosy are actually various scaling or erupting skin diseases perhaps caused by some other non-Hanson microorganisms, cancers, or even allergies. But people with those skin diseases were severely

discriminated against by the religious authorities of the time. They were banned from temple worship. But temple practice recognized that healings did occur from time to time, and there were rituals to restore those healed back to the culture of the physically healthy, hence Jesus' directive to the ten lepers to go to the priests for the readmittance ceremonies. What the healed Samaritan leper realized was that the one who had given them healing was greater than any temple priest he could possibly find elsewhere. And he recognized Jesus as the great high priest. As a result of his profession of praise to God and his

expression of profound gratitude to Jesus for his mighty miracle, Jesus gives him eternal salvation. Our text reads, “Your faith has made you well,” but the Greek word for “well” would be better translated as “whole” or even more literally, “saved”. The one who recognized the power of God in Jesus came back to him for a completed healing, one which included eternal life.

Being healed means being cured in the usual interpretation of the word, and I must say I pray regularly in our Sunday Eucharists for cures for those who come for those prayers. But I realize in my heart that some diseases are not likely to be healed by

any medical intervention, so my prayers literally are for God to hear the prayers of the one coming for healing for themselves or for others and for God to give them what they need, not necessarily always what they ask for. What people are actually often praying for is not for simple physical healing but for the more enduring sense that all is going to be OK for them or for their loved one. And in their hearts I think they will come to find God's word of what it is they need most. Maybe it is indeed the comfort of complete physical healing of a specific malady. Or maybe it is the knowledge that they or their loved one will

simply be fully consoled by God even while the infirmity continues. I know for sure that if we could simply get complete healing from time to time, we would simply not age, we would live indefinitely. But I realize that will not happen. Age will continue to attack our bodies with all of its armamentarium. And no amount of prayer will keep us around for more than about 120 years at most.

The oldest person I have prayed with was 106 years old. When I asked her to what she attributed her longevity, she smiled and replied, “I have broken all the ten commandments but one: “Honor your father

and your mother that your days may be long on the earth.” Her 88 year old niece who was caring for her went on a trip to Atlantic City one weekend and died upon her return. So she had to seek out someone else to care for her since she wanted to remain in her own apartment. But she was always cheerful. She did not let worry or anxiety weigh her down, probably another secret to long life.

The most difficult people I have had the opportunity to pray with for healing were physicians. One psychiatrist friend of mine had so absorbed his patients’ maladies that he had become completely unable to sleep

or eat properly. But he regularly asked me to come pray with him until he was finally able to adjust to a lower pressure lifestyle.

Another doctor was a great physical diagnostician who knew exactly the outcome of his malignancy. He sought comfort in prayer and reading the Bible and found his peace and wholeness before the end.

And for those of us who pray a lot, at our end it will likely be extremely difficult to be totally reliant upon the prayers of others, which of course we will be needing desperately. But even now I try never to hesitate in asking for the prayers of others,

and I can sense the power of those prayers bridging my life across what seemed unfathomable ravines of difficulty. In the eerie darkness of the pile and pit at Ground Zero during the months after 9-11, I never had the sense of being totally alone even though I may have been the only clergyperson anywhere on the site that evening. My church's prayers sustained me vitally, and I thanked them always for praying for me.

My liturgy professor in seminary gave a fascinating lecture on healing prayer in which he noted that simply giving God glory was all it often would take to find healing.

The healed Samaritan in today's gospel lesson found that to be the case. He came to Jesus "praising God with a loud voice."

When we get into that 'glory' mode, all heavenly beings are singing along with us, 'Worship and praise, dominion and splendor, to the one who sits upon the throne of heaven.' And we further proclaim in Canticle 18, taken from the book of Revelation, Chapter 4, "Splendor and honor and kingly power are yours by right, O Lord our God, for you created everything that is, and by your will they were created and have their being." This puts in perspective that we are God's creation, and as such we are

destined for completeness and wholeness once again when we live with Christ in glory. The God who created us can recreate us even in this life, fully whole and healed. Is it too little to believe that the one who stilled the mighty waters can still our turbulent hearts?

Music is a key feature of glory-giving. When we have a song of praise to God in our heart, we can sense more fully the power of God being made available to us at that moment. So I ask you to do what the writer of Ephesians, Chapter 5, Verse 19 suggests, “...sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and

making melody to the Lord in your hearts.”
Do as the healed man leper did, praise God
with a loud voice, and you too will find
healing and the peace that passes all
understanding.

Jesus had already sent the Samaritan
leper away with the nine others to go “to the
priests” in like manner to what Naomi did to
her two daughters-in-law in one Old
Testament lesson. But just as Ruth declared
her fidelity and total loyalty to her mother-
in-law Naomi, the healed Samaritan
declared his fidelity and total loyalty to
Jesus by his returning to bow at Jesus’ feet
to praise God and thank him. Jesus’ act of

sending the lepers away was actually a test of the faith of those who had been healed. The one who had the fullest faith recognized that no other priest would substitute for the one whose feet he was before now. It is actually not so much just the giving of thanks that is important, although that is one key element of praise. The kernel we should remember is that we owe complete loyalty to our Lord and Savior, in good times and in bad times. Even if we hear his voice testing us by saying, 'Find some other to go to,' we must resist that, knowing in our heart that we will never find another whose power and love will ever match that of Jesus Christ.

We can only really know God by knowing Christ first. All other ways are sinking sand, as the old hymn says. All other ways except the way to Jesus are sinking quicksand.

So have joy in your heart today. Yvonne Dilling, a church worker from Indiana, told UCC pastor Joyce Hollyday about the time she had spent with people exiled to Honduras from El Salvador by the repressive government there in that Central American country in the early 1990's. The refugees had been able to avoid the machine gun strafing of the Salvadoran helicopters and had immediately begun to build a camp once they got to safety. Their first task had

been to form three committees: a construction committee, an education committee, and the “comite de alegria”, the “committee of joy”. Celebration was as basic to the life of the refugees as digging latrines and teaching their children to read. Even in exile, they remembered to build and plant and to dance and sing. That is an excellent model for us as well. When we decide to embark on a new journey let be sure one of the committees we set up for ourselves is a “comite de alegria”, a “committee of joy”. The Committee of Joy will help remind us of the victory we already have in Christ Jesus. The Committee of Joy

will lead us in celebrating the great healing power of God that is ours through Jesus Christ.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.

Description: Jesus saved the one who returned to thank him after being healed.

Tags: Leprosy, Hansen's, Samaritan, detention, 9-11, cancer, healing, save, El Salvador, Honduras, joy, doctors, Israel, worry, praise, Albert Einstein, skin, therapy, radiation, age, bodies, well, whole, exile, prayers, malignancy, music, prays, thankful