

Title: Same
Text: Luke 17.11-19
Theme: Same need = same solution
Series: Luke
Prop Stmnt: Sin is our great leveler and sickness/death is a reminder.

Read Text:

Cathi wanted to do something together for Valentine's Day, so we ended up going to the Zekelman Holocaust Center in Farmington Hills. Granted, it was not the most romantic choice we could have made, but we had wanted to visit this center for years and we just decided to do it. The Holocaust, which refers to the systemic killing of the Jewish people and others by the Nazi regime in Germany remains as one of the biggest blights and horrific griefs in our modern era. It is not the only attempt at ethnic cleansing and is not the biggest, not by a long shot. Stalin – Ukraine, Pol Pot – Cambodia, Hutu's in Rwanda. The story of our world is punctuated with these kinds of atrocities that in certain settings seem to defy rational explanations for how something like this could actually have happened.

What is the root of this? This thinking is the fruit of tribalism. Tribalism is the idea that my tribe, my people are better or more important than others. When you break it down to the individual it is the idea that I am better than you, I am more important than you. It is part of the curse. One child wants the toy the other child has, so he goes over and simply takes it. One child is jealous of the attention that another sibling is getting, so he/she acts up in order to get the attention back on him/her. No child had to be taught to do this. It is part of our fallen nature. Our hearts are tilted toward the idea that we are better than others. When someone comes along and says that they have scientific or historical evidence to prove that, we are already inclined to believe that. That is music to our ears even while it is more poison for our hearts.

Circumstances in Germany almost 100 years ago made it convenient to target the Jews and they were targeted with a message that strikes fear into each of us: "You don't belong here. We don't want you here. We are better than you. You're not one of us. You're different." We have all felt that from others, haven't we? When the allied forces discovered Aushwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor and the other death camps, they were aghast and tried to get their minds around how could people do this to other people. And the Allies were tempted to believe that they were morally superior to the Nazi's and now assumed that these ideas were true about them: "You don't belong here. We are better than you. You're different."

2,000 years ago, there was deep-seated hostility on the part of the Jews toward the Gentiles and on the part of the Gentiles, including the Samaritans (who were half Jew and half Gentile) toward the Jews. There were certain lines that you were not expected to cross including certain people you were not to be seen with nor worship with.

1. **Are we really different from one another?** (11-12)

Do African Americans live forever and all white people die? Do Asians never get sick and Latinos are never well? Oh no. We all get sick and we all die. Disease and death are the great equalizers. And here is a rather fascinating scene in view of the racial tension in view. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. He is traveling in an area between Samaria and Galilee. He enters an unnamed village which may itself be a mixture of Jews and Samaritans. We don't know exactly where this is, but we know that near this village he is met, from a distance by a group of lepers. There are 10 of them.

At first reading, this may sound like another healing account where Luke is showcasing the authority and mercy of Christ as well as pointing out our need to be grateful. That is certainly true. But there is more. In fact, when Luke explicitly states that the only leper who returned to thank Jesus for his healing was a Samaritan, we then realize there is more to this than healing. At least one of the ten was a Samaritan. This poor bloke has, from the perspective of some, a double whammy. He has leprosy and he is a Samaritan. To some, that has got to be the worst! It is possible that the other nine were Jews, or perhaps there were other Samaritans as well. After all, Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests. We assume, therefore, that at least several of them, perhaps the rest of them were Jews. So, now, how do we look at this group of 10 who are calling out to Jesus from a distance? Are they really different from one another? Not really. Leprosy, like most diseases is no respecter of persons. It affects us all, even those who claim that they are promised healing in this life, get sick and die. Disease and death is the great equalizer.

I used to take my dad to his chemo treatment appointments. Many of you know the setting. You are in a large room with a few rows of recliners where people come, sit, get their IV hooked up and while the drug drips they pull out their phones, magazines, books, or something to pass the time. If you are on the same schedule as others, you nod at the familiar faces and perhaps over time ask about diagnosis, story, treatment, etc. No one actually wants to be there, but there is a comradery you share from a shared condition. The question of point 1 is answered by point 2.

2. We all have the same need. (12-13)

Leprosy was a term that described several skin diseases, including what we now call Hansen's disease. The OT law had a protocol for this which, once identified, called for the one diagnosed to live outside of the city where he/she could receive food, but not be near others and spread the disease. It felt like a death sentence and in many ways it was. If a leper was approached by someone, the leper had to cover his mouth and yell, "unclean" so others would be warned. Lepers formed communities that became known as leper colonies. You may have been wealthy, you may have been a slave, you may be young, middle age, old, poor, male or female, but once diagnosed with leprosy, you are now part of this community because of your need. This is the community that you need but you don't want, because it means that you have a need that has no cure. You may have been a Jew who said to the Samaritans, or a Samaritan who previously said to the Jews, "you don't belong here." You may have been wealthy who said to the poor, "I am better than you." You may have been one of the smartest, strongest, fastest, prettiest, wittiest, funniest ones in your class and you thought that you are inherently superior to others.

But now, disease has leveled you. You belong to the community of need. 10 lepers. 10 people bound together by a problem they have no solution for. Were they the only lepers from that colony or area? Don't know. But they were 10 lepers who were willing to accept the reality of their condition.

Leprosy is an illustration of sin. The one afflicted is unclean, isolated, ashamed, and often without hope of a cure. The real problem is sin, not sickness. Accounts like this are needful for us to do a heart check-up and see if we realize what our condition is apart from Christ.

Questions to ask yourself

3. We all need the same Savior. (13-14a)

These lepers wanted to be healed. There was no known cure but somehow, they heard about Jesus and somehow, they heard that Jesus was coming to their area. Back in chapter 5 Jesus healed a man with leprosy and perhaps word of that or other healings made it to these guys. As Jesus entered the village, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance. They were shouting (lifted up their voices), "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Whether in unison, or shouting as a group, their plea was loud, personal, urgent and desperate. They don't care who hears them. They may have been at one time ashamed and embarrassed at their condition, but now their cry for help outweighs their concern for embarrassment. Jesus, Master. Jesus means savior and master is another term for Lord. Their cry could be a great expression of saving faith. I don't think that was how they were thinking of it. I think they were just wanting to be healed of their leprosy, not necessarily saved from their sin. But at least they acknowledged that their only hope was Jesus.

If we understood our need as it really is, we'd probably shout a little bit louder for Jesus to help us, too. When you have a terminal diagnosis, hope feels like a dangerous thing because the risk of disappointment is so great. What would Jesus do? Would he respond to their cry for mercy? When I listen to the testimonies of those getting baptized, I hear some familiar themes from some of the those who grew up here. I heard the gospel growing up. I knew the stories. I thought I was fine. It wasn't until this event or this moment when I realized that I didn't really believe it. I understand that to a degree. When I was close to 18, I heard about the holiness of God for what seemed like the first time in my life. I was overwhelmed. I grew up in church and sat through thousands of sermons, but I had never heard it or understood it like that before. Then in my later 20's I started to grasp the doctrine of justification like never before. Other doctrines followed. But it wasn't until I was in my later 40's and early 50's when I began to see the mercy of God like never before. It was always right there, but when we were studying Exodus together, I began to see it as if I was understanding it for the first time. I remember realizing that God told Moses to construct the Tabernacle with the Holy of Holies as the most sacred spot on earth. In that little room was the Ark of the Covenant that symbolized the throne of God from which he ruled over his people and the name of the top of that Ark was called the Mercy Seat!

Of all the things that God could have called his throne such as: seat of power, seat of authority, seat of God, seat of justice, seat of glory, seat of awe, he calls it the Mercy Seat. When God revealed a partial glimpse of his glory to Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 34, God specifically identifies himself as *“a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...”* Then one day I was reading through 2 Chronicles and I came to chapter 33 which records the reign of Manasseh, the incredibly wicked king of Judah who squandered the great momentum of his father, Hezekiah. Manasseh was a first order dirtbag. He literally burned his sons on pagan altars to idols. He used sorcery, mediums and necromancers. He set up an image of an idol right in the Temple. The text says that he led Judah and Jerusalem to do more evil than even the nations that came before them in the land. So, Manasseh ends up being defeated in battle and taken captive into another country hundreds of miles away now from Jerusalem. And I read that and think, good! That’s where he belongs. This guy is disgusting. Then what? He repents! And I sort of assume, “yea right!” But I remember being thunderstruck by the text that says two times in that chapter, “God was moved by his entreaty.” Manasseh’s plea for mercy resonated with God because our God is a God of mercy and cries for mercy are the heart language of our God.

So, when we read that these lepers were crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” They may be thinking that they were taking a risk by hoping for a rescue that was not realistic, but we hear their cry and all we can do is to begin to smile and imagine the happy reunions that will happen in the next few hours as these men are restored to their wives and families. Asking God for mercy is like asking it to be hot and humid in Alabama in August.

Now Jesus speaks. He gives them a command that implies a promise. Go show yourselves to the priest. If you think you are healed from a leprous condition, then it is the priest who will declare you to be clean so you can be restored to your family and community. The command to go to the priest means that these guys should expect to be healed and they were. “As they went they were healed.” It sort of sounds like Namaan’s story from 2 Kings. Their faith was evidenced in their obedience.

Off they go. What was that like? I wonder if Jesus and the disciples stood there and watched them walk, then jog, then run. Did their healing bring a restoration of flesh and muscle that enabled them to stop limping and start sprinting? Were they hooting and hollering and high-fiving? These group is heading down the road when one stops and turns around and starts coming back. This time he, instead of calling to Jesus from a distance, came and fell on his face at the feet of Jesus. He could do that now. He was cleansed. Luke says that he was giving thanks.

Luke was not one of the 12 disciples. He was not there. Luke wrote his account based on the testimony of the eyewitnesses that he interviewed and spent so much time with. I like to imagine Luke talking at dinner one evening with a couple of the disciples who were recalling this story and getting excited about it, when one of them says, “Yea, and the dude was a Samaritan.” This event would have, at that point, been hard for them to know what file in their thinking to put it in, until Acts 8. The disciples would eventually see what Jesus was doing. He was planting the seeds for what his church was going to look like. There would be people from every tribe,

language and nation who would find the ground level at the foot of the cross. In fact, this Samaritan could very well have been one of the influential and core members of one of the churches in Samaria. But at this moment, his This thankful leper, who was no longer a leper, would now model the other side of conversion. He would be cleansed, he would know Jesus and his life would be marked by gratitude.

4. **Genuine believers receive a new life.** (15-19)

After this account, I think there is only one more story in Luke of Jesus healing someone before he dies on the cross. The healings are dialing down. His teaching is dialing up. Jesus had done enough healings early in his ministry to demonstrate his authority and identity and to authenticate his teaching. So, we are right to read this asking ourselves, why is this story here? Several things become evident. Physical healing was not the ultimate goal of the ministry of Christ, but saving people from their sin and bringing them into a relationship with God through Christ. However, most people are sadly satisfied to simply use God for the life they think they want. Getting healed from leprosy is wonderful, but getting healed from leprosy and failing to embrace Jesus for who he is, is an epic tragedy. Let's think about this.

What does Jesus do when this man comes back? Jesus responded to this man's gratitude by asking three questions, which seem to be directed to his disciples, not just to the Samaritan. "*Were not 10 cleansed?*" The answer is, yes. 10 were cleansed. "*Where are the nine?*" What is the assumption of Jesus behind that question? The other nine should be here as well. Then Jesus presses into this harder with his third question. "*Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?*"

The fact that Jesus stopped and pressed into this means that this is a big deal. Jesus is right to expect thankfulness on the part of all of them and he makes it clear that the other nine were not thankful. This is not a minor point, like forgetting to send a thank-you note or text. Jesus is making it clear that these men were not responding to this from the heart. Thanksgiving comes from the realization that you have been given something that you do not deserve. That means that these 9 believed that their leprosy was totally unfair. They were owed healing. They deserved to be cleansed. Their healing was just righting a wrong that should never have taken place to begin with.

All 10 were cleansed physically, but Jesus specifically commends the Samaritan who came back and said, "*your faith has made you well.*" The verb that is translated, "made you well" is the verb "to save." It certainly can mean to be saved or delivered from a deadly disease, but it is also used to mean saved from sin, saved from eternal destruction. I think that both of those are in view here. This man realizes that he is healed physically. He is grateful for that and praises God. This is stated by Luke and commended by Christ. But his praising of God is tied directly to his acknowledgment that Jesus did this. He knows that he is cleansed. He calls on Jesus as Master to have mercy on him and Jesus does and now he realizes that the power to heal must mean that Jesus is from God. So, he returns and puts himself in a position of worship,

thankfulness, adoration, trust and submission to Christ. That looks like he just became a follower of Christ. The others are only interested in the healing. He gets it. This is more!

Jesus points out the contrast. The others are gone, this man is here. Jesus commends this and then assures this man that his faith has delivered him. The fact that he commends this man specifically means that this man's faith is different than the others. The others believed enough to go to the priest, but this man believed deeper. He understood what they missed. Healing from leprosy was simply a means to a greater healing and Jesus assured him, that he got it.

Jesus is not your piggy bank, slot machine, or miracle max. Jesus does not owe you healing.