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Luke 17:11-19  
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### “One Turned Back”

Introduction – the disciples had just asked Jesus to increase their faith – when he said that marvelous thing about the mustard seed, and moving trees into the sea. In today’s lesson Jesus and the disciples are taking a road trip – walking the border between Samaria and Galilee – headed toward Jerusalem. They aren’t traveling in a straight path – like we would take I-71 directly to get to Columbus – but they are missionarily meandering through the towns along the way as they journey toward Jerusalem. And as they are going - this marvelous scene of great faith unfolds right before their eyes.

Hear God’s word – **Luke 17:11-19**

#### **SERMON:**

And Jesus said, “Get up and go on your way – your faith has made you well.” I found that phrase so intriguing that I went to other translations of scripture to see how else it was interpreted – and found these variations, “Your faith has cured you.” (New English) “Your faith has saved you.” (Jerusalem). “Your faith has made you whole.” (KJV)

Clearly, whatever happened to the tenth leper was different from what happened to the other nine. All ten were healed of their dreaded disease – but one was healed and made well – cured, saved, made whole.

As we begin to think into this passage this morning I’d like to plant a seed for thought to run along the back of your mind while we hear this word. Who is it in your life who has made you whole – not just healed, but made well or whole. And if you would – go in your thoughts one step beyond your parents. But instead think to a friend, a mentor, sibling, colleague – someone who has brought into your life wellness or wholeness – beyond healing.

We’ll come back to this.

People in Jesus’ day were deathly afraid of lepers. It was a dreaded disease – believed to be highly contagious. If even in the mere presence of a leper, people believed their health and spiritual well-being could be in danger. So, for the health of the village, all lepers were kept apart – in separate colonies, away from everyone else. And as a leper traveled about – if they traveled about - they were required to make their presence known so someone wouldn’t accidentally come in contact with them. They clacked their clackers, and called out their approach in a loud voice, “Unclean, unclean.”

There they were this day – 10 of them - on the ridge above the village, heading toward Jerusalem, when they saw Jesus and called out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” And Jesus hollered back to them, “Go see the priests.” That’s what you did when you thought you might be healed of this awful skin disease. You went to see a priest who could certify that you were indeed healed and issue you a certificate of health – and thereby get your back into circulation.

Imagine their reaction when Jesus told them to go see the priests – could it be true? Could they possibly be real again? – Could they rejoin the unmarginalized folks, the normal people – go once again into the markets and synagogues without calling out their

presence – live in a real home! Think of it. He told them to go to the priests, and amazingly they did just that! The text tells us that they were healed ..... as they went! Which means that when they started toward the temple to find the priests, they still had leprosy!

Picture 10 downtrodden people from the garbage heap of life joining arms, starting off toward the temple to show themselves to the priests and as they go – as they walk - some mysterious tingling with healing power happens to them – and they are clean, their skin restored, the sores are healed. Are they grateful? Oh yeah they are. They are deliriously happy – whooping and hollering and praising and dancing their joy – as they head off to the Temple, doing exactly what Jesus told them to do – go see the priests. When suddenly one stops dead in his tracks. And not just any one of the ten – but the least of the least. The guy on the bottom rung of the lowest ladder in the pits of society. The double outcast - the unclean of the unclean - stops dead in his tracks – looks at himself - runs back full steam to Jesus, falls on his face at Jesus’ feet and says, “Thanks Jesus. Thanks for giving me my life back – for treating me like a real person and not like some scum on the margins of life who doesn’t matter.” Thanks.

And Jesus said, “Were there not ten of you in that group? Where are the other nine? Are you the only one to return – and you a foreigner at that. Get up off your face – go – on your way – your faith has made you whole.”

The math is simple. 100% healed – 10% returned to say thanks. And that one found wholeness in addition to his healing. The math is simple – the problem is pretty complex.

Everyday we receive God’s gifts that heal us, make us whole. Incredible gifts from God. Sooner or later someone will recognize from whence their wholeness comes – deserved or not – and return to give thanks. Consider the healing God gives us:

- the healing power of a good night’s sleep
- The healing power of blue skies and sunshine – that gets us outside.
- the healing power of grey skies and drizzle that keeps us inside for a change
- The healing power of the Psalms, Mozart, Ben and Jerry’s, laughing until you cry, crying until you feel cleansed.
- The healing touch of a spouse – your child’s hug.

God offers this healing (and much more) every day: physical, spiritual, emotional. To the lowest of the very low he said, “Your faith has made you whole. And when we turn back – we are not just healed – but whole. That’s what we say in our healing services. Christian healing is a process that brings us closer to God: spiritually, physically increasing our faith – identifying the places of brokenness and leading us toward wellness and wholeness.

Sooner or later we need to remember who gave us life in the first place – who heals our brokenness, who provides daily displays of health and abundance, and where to go when we are hurting. Sooner or later we will remember and return to give thanks for this life – all of it.

There’s a place in town where I enjoy going for lunch – because it is that reminder to me of faith and thanks that the disciples got when they asked Jesus to ‘increase their faith’ and along the ridge came those 10 lepers seeking mercy. It’s a place I go – because the food is --- ok. It’s a place I go because the service is ---- ok. It’s a

place I go because the people who work there heal me, give me hope, and remind me of the one who turned back to say thanks. Eating at Hattie's reminds me to turn back to God. Not because of health - but because of wholeness. If we eat at Hattie's and do not see God we are missing the opportunity of turning back to say thanks.

According to the Journal of Personal and Social Psychology counting your blessings is good for you. Those who did the study were found to have slept better, exercised more, and cared for others more – saw the richness of life when they counted their blessings. While those who were directed to 'count their hassles' focused on their lack and poverty of life and felt deprived – not whole.

The doctor went every year to work in a Honduran village for two weeks and his pastor said to him, "How wonderful you are to go work and help among the poor." The doctor said, "Oh, I don't go to help the poor, I go to restore my faith. Their faith is so vibrant and strong it puts mine to shame. I go to the villages of Honduras for my wholeness as much as for their health."

Turning back to say thanks to God is an obvious lesson in this passage. Hopefully we'll find ourselves among the 10% who remember, not the 90% who went rejoicing on their way to receive their certification of healing.

Let's get back to that person I asked you to think about – that person who has been a healing presence of wholeness in your life. A friend, a teacher, sibling, mentor, colleague, neighbor –who has been there for us as a beacon of wellness in our life or who has brought wholeness into our life.

Have you turned back to express your gratitude to him/her?

I want to offer a time of silence now to reflect on this person

We've been having a period of quiet time following the sermon the last few weeks – but instead I want to do it at this point today....that we might think on someone who has brought wholeness, wellness to our life.

[Time of reflection.....]

Please covenant – not necessarily with me, but with God – to let that person know that you give him/her thanks. Go home and write him/her, or visit him, or call her, to in some way let him know, that you have turned back to say thanks.

Indeed, we give thanks to God for 100% of life and the people that come into and out of our days. For daily opportunities for health and expressions of healing and wholeness in our days. For those people who help us see that joy we turn back and give thanks and praise.

Lord Jesus – have mercy upon us, Amen