

 *St Paul's Anglican Parish of Ipswich*
SUNDAY SERMON

"To Be Made Whole"

Delivered by Rev'd Steve McMahon on the 13th October 2019

On the way to Jerusalem to face the cross - while he was near Samaria - Jesus encountered ten lepers; ten outcasts; ten people with the equivalent of ebola. They are under a sentence of death. No one will come near them or touch them; no one will even touch their clothing and their eating utensils. By the rules of their society (rules created because of the fear of contamination) lepers were forced to live apart from everyone else, and on those occasions when they drew near to others for one reason or other, they rang little bells to announce their presence and to warn others to stand off.

As Jesus enters a village ten lepers approach him and, mindful of the rules of their society which stated that they must stand at least 50 yards off, they call out to Jesus from a distance: "Jesus, Master, Have Mercy On Us." And Jesus responds, in a most unusual manner. Rather than saying (as he had said to others) "be healed", Jesus responds to their cry by saying - "go and show yourselves to the priests". This was because lepers were not allowed in the temple since they were regarded as "unclean". If cured, however, the leper could gain re-admission to the temple and to the rest of society, if he was ritually purified and certified as "clean" by a priest. Still, Jesus' command to the ten lepers is a bit confusing. They have asked for mercy - they have asked to be healed. But Jesus does nothing for them but tell them to go and act as if they are healed - to go and present themselves to the priests as if they were whole, healed, accepted, living people.

Yet, despite the unusual response of Jesus and as they go - as they walk down the path towards the priests in the village they are healed.

And, as we know one of the ten: a Samaritan man, upon realizing he has been made clean, turns back and praising God with a loud voice he comes up Jesus, prostrates himself and thanks him. And Jesus says something very strange and very important to his disciples. After noting the absence of the nine, he says to the man: 'Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well.'" The word for well that is used here in the Greek can be used to mean "healed" - but also means to be made whole or to be saved.

We all know, or ought to know, that faith makes us whole. That is a basic tenet of our teaching. But here, in this story, we have the opportunity to see faith in a different light than we might normally see it. We have the opportunity to see faith as something that leads us to a life that is more than normal. And we have the opportunity to see faith as nothing more difficult and as nothing more profound as remembering what God has done and giving thanks to him for it.

What, after all, is the difference between the nine lepers who are made clean and the tenth leper who is not only made clean, but made whole? Between the nine who go to the priests as commanded and the one who returns to Jesus praising God and thanking Jesus for healing him? The difference is that one of the healed lepers, the Samaritan, realizes real resurrection. He alone comes back to say "Thanks". He realizes that his healing comes from God and that God has put him in a relationship to Jesus and that that relationship alone has made him whole and alive again. All that the other nine wanted out of Jesus was to be made well, to go back home and start all over again, and who could blame them? But that one Samaritan comes back not only cured, but saved - made

whole. He was saved and accepted by Jesus while he was a leper - while he was untouchable. And then was made well.

Nine lepers got healed, one got saved. Nine people go away from Jesus healed, but not saved, because they put their lives as lepers; as outcasts behind them. They go in obedience most certainly, but they go in a hurry, anxious to be on with it; to begin living like everyone lives. They go away unsaved because all they really want is a normal life - a life like that they have dreamed of, a life like that which they had before they became lepers, - a life like everyone else's. But the tenth leper: he is not in such a hurry to forget how bad it was. He's not in such a hurry to get a normal life. He realizes something important. He realizes that the hand of God has touched his life; that Jesus has accepted him - as he accepted the other nine.

And as the Samaritan realizes this he realizes how unusual, how out of the ordinary, how exceptional this is, and he gives thanks to God, and to Jesus for it. It is this acknowledgement of this fact that is called faith by Jesus - a faith that saves. What a shame to have met Jesus, the Lord and Giver of Life, to have met the one who loves to eat and drink with sinners and to worship in the synagogues and in the temple and to pray alone on the mountain tops and in the wilderness, and to then come away from that meeting with nothing more than our health; with nothing more than normal.

The power of salvation, of wholeness, is in remembering our previous state; how we were enslaved by the powers of despair, darkness, and death, - it's in remembering all the people who we used to be and seeing the miracle of what we have now - of seeing that God has acted and is still acting and rejoicing and being glad in it.

Our faith is not about how to live a normal life but about how to live a life more extraordinary. It is about how God touches us and Christ embraces us, and raises not only that which was dead to new life, but transforms that which was ordinary into the blessedness of the more than normal, the blessedness of knowing that God's hand and God's heart is in each and every moment of each and every new day.

God, through Jesus Christ does not just make us well - that's what a physician does. God, through Jesus Christ makes us whole.