

## You Got the Healing that I Want

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7  
Luke 17:11-19

This is the quintessential Jesus story: Jesus heals, Jesus not only includes but lifts up the foreigner, Jesus offers salvation to the least in society. We know these motifs, and they define our faith. Healing, inclusion, relationship, transformation...these, in a nutshell, are the gospel.

Today's gospel demonstrates the distinction between healing and cure. Sometimes both happen together, but often one happens and not the other. In the case of the one leper, both happened. The other nine, however, were cured but not healed. Let's look more closely.

According to the law, anyone who had leprosy must live outside of the city and declare themselves unclean when another approached. Before someone cured of leprosy could return to the community, a priest must ensure that he or she was indeed clean. Unfortunately, the translation we are using this morning does not make this clear, but Luke's Greek actually refers to the characters in the story as ones who have leprosy rather than lepers. The difference is subtle but significant; from Luke's point of view, their illness is not their entire identity. Still, for the purposes of the greater society, lepers were outcasts.

Jesus had gained a reputation for healing, and the ten with leprosy approached him for help. Notice that Jesus does not directly heal them but commands them to see their priests. During his ministry and still today, Jesus weaves an intricate web of relationships. While Jesus is the source of the restoration, restoration happens in the context of community. It was the priests who would declare the lepers clean and reintegrate them into the society.

But the climax of the story does not come at the curing of leprosy; it occurs when the one Samaritan returns. This detail complements many of the other gospel stories. Whereas last week, we heard about the disciples' ignorance about their ability and duty to do God's work with the faith that they had rather than seeking more faith, here we have an explosion of gratitude from an outsider. God's supposed followers did not understand how to live faithfully but the foreigner did. We know that Samaritans were among the least in society, and yet here and elsewhere they are the ones who see and know God most clearly. It is the one leper, the Samaritan, who is cured and healed; he is offered the gift of salvation and relationship with God.

The other nine had their disease cured, but they were not brought back to wholeness. Their brokenness, as far as the leprosy was concerned, was addressed, but their leprosy was not their entire identity. They did not experience the deepest form of healing--that is, return to God. Healing, or wholeness, which comes from the Hebrew "shalom," involves restoration and a piecing back together. The nine's health was pieced back together and so perhaps was their standing in society, but their healing was incomplete because they did not rest in God's love and power.

Our world today mostly seeks cures, but, as demonstrated by today's gospel, cures do not always bring healing. We want to fix things quickly and solve problems but oftentimes we do so only at a superficial level. Medical advances and technology allow us to bring treatments and solutions in ways that decades ago were unimaginable: we can treat infertility better than ever before, we can ease the effects of aging and prolong life, we can reconstruct or create artificial body parts that function nearly as well as those present from birth. All of this is amazing, and God works through those doctors and nurses and researchers and caregivers who have made such feats possible.

Anyone who has had a serious brush with an illness or disease, however, will tell you that science does not--cannot--solve everything. Amputees feel phantom pain in their limbs years after removal, in vitro fertilization brings into the world many miracle babies but cannot erase the painful experiences of struggle and loss preceding, and drugs may help ease symptoms but do not remove the worry, stress, fear, and strain on relationships. No, cure is not the same as healing.

I have an especially tender story from my time at a different St. John's in Washington, DC. The parish secretary died from pancreatic cancer within the span of a few months, but most people did not even know that she was sick until she died. She was a single mom, fiercely strong and protective over her children and privacy. She worked until the minute that her body would no longer allow her to sit at the keyboard. She was estranged from her mother and father and the children's father was no longer in the picture, and she worried about what was to happen to her children. In her last few weeks of life, she and her children began building a fragile but promising relationship with her parents; her son's school arranged to cover his tuition and offer him room and board until his high school graduation; the church put together a savings fund for her daughter and son; and she and the rector arranged her funeral. She died at peace, knowing that those who mattered most to her would have the care and support they needed. She was healed but not cured.

We pray, of course, that God will bring both, healing and cure. Sometimes, though, we, like the Israelites, are living in darker moments of exile, and we must take up residence in our present circumstances even if no immediate remedy is in sight. Keep on going, the prophet Jeremiah told the people. Keep on living. Things may not be as you want right now but hold fast to your faith.

Such is the case for many of us with this church right now: St. John the Baptist is going through a serious transition, a time of loss and redefinition,

and needs to keep leaning in to the present and the future. Perhaps the same is true in your own life: you are feeling your way into your next chapter or facing challenges, but an easy fix and answer is not coming.

God simply asks us to put one foot in front of the other, over and over again, and to find reasons, like the one leper, to explode with gratitude. God does not always promise a cure, but God always heals, if we open ourselves enough to receive it.

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Psalms 66:1-11

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

1 Be joyful in God, all you lands; \*

sing the glory of his Name;

sing the glory of his praise.

2 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! \*

because of your great strength your enemies cringe before you.

3 All the earth bows down before you, \*

sings to you, sings out your Name."

4 Come now and see the works of God, \*

how wonderful he is in his doing toward all people.

5 He turned the sea into dry land,

so that they went through the water on foot, \*  
and there we rejoiced in him.

6 In his might he rules for ever;  
his eyes keep watch over the nations; \*  
let no rebel rise up against him.

7 Bless our God, you peoples; \*  
make the voice of his praise to be heard;

8 Who holds our souls in life, \*  
and will not allow our feet to slip.

9 For you, O God, have proved us; \*  
you have tried us just as silver is tried.

10 You brought us into the snare; \*  
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.

11 You let enemies ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and water; \*  
but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David--  
that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being  
chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I  
endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain  
the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is  
sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

if we are faithless, he remains faithful--

for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

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."