

WEEKLY SERMON

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Jesus first, in all things

Honestly, it's quite hard not to feel sympathetic towards the nine ungrateful lepers in Luke's gospel (c17 v11-19).

Look at the situation. They've spent the last however long being shunned by society, cast out from their homes, families and comforts, with the fear that the illness causing them incredible discomfort was, in fact, a sign of God's condemnation.

So, when Jesus appears before them, rumoured to be able to heal the unhealable and tells them to go immediately and show themselves to the priests ... of course they would do precisely as they are asked.

After all, Naaman's leprosy was cured after doing precisely what Elisha told him. And upon realising they were healed, who would deviate from the path? Who'd want to jeopardise this immense gift? Wasn't Lot's wife punished for turning back after being instructed to keep going forward?

Not to mention, our friends the lepers would have been quite used to avoiding other people at this point, as they had been obliged to do for the entirety of their illness. Really, it's understandable why nine of the healed didn't immediately prioritise what seems like a point of etiquette, over doing what Jesus had commanded them.

And yet the tenth healed, who turns back to give thanks, is celebrated by Jesus for doing so! It almost seems counter-intuitive in the context of everything we've seen so far. But the tenth healed, wittingly or unwittingly, shows us a truth about what it means to really carry out the commands of Christ – that no instruction Jesus gives us ever comes without incorporating time spent with him.

Our instruction from this weekend's Gospel, then, isn't simply one of giving thanks (as important as it is to do so). We gather in church as Christ's body, to be nurtured in Word and Sacrament. We are fed, and we are sent out to carry the Good News to all people.

What a task! What a thing to have asked of us, what a role to be trusted with! How can we possibly expect to fulfil such a commandment without first pausing to give thanks ourselves for that wonderful Good News of slaves freed, the hungry fed, the leper healed?

Christ died to set us free; let all your works, then, be grounded by time spent in the presence of the one who has done this wonderful thing for you.

Rev Rebecca Feeney

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES