

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Sunday 29th March 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Two weeks' ago, we began our journey towards Easter, and we tuned in to that part of Luke's gospel where Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Today is our final service before Palm Sunday, and our passage this morning, is the third and final story where Samaritans are talked about.

Boys and girls, can you remember: did the people in Jesus' day like Samaritans? Did they? Give me a thumbs up or thumbs down! The right answer is: "no" – they did not like Samaritans! No one in Israel had time for Samaritans; no one would give them attention or help.

So, in our story today Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem when He comes to a village and He is met by a group of men. How many people were in that group – can you remember? Was it 5? Was it 8? Was it 10? It was 10!

Ten men were needing help, so they came looking for Jesus. But they kept a little distance from Jesus because they had leprosy. That word was used for a whole lot of different conditions, because back then it was pretty hard to tell what people had. **So, a rule was given** that anyone with a particular skin condition had to leave home, they had to leave the village because those skin conditions could be spread to other people and the only way to protect the community was for those people to be isolated, they had to be removed.

I wonder, does that feel familiar at all? Can we relate a little to the idea of being cut off, isolated, alone?

So, here are these lepers, social outcasts; they draw near to Jesus seeking His help, but they have to maintain social distancing, probably more than two metres. **They cry out to Jesus, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’ ‘Pity’ here is what we might call ‘mercy’, or ‘loving kindness’.**

Somehow, these lepers knew that Jesus was someone of loving kindness, and so they seek Him out. Jesus then says a bit of a strange thing and we’ll get into that more with our Tuesday Evening Sermon.

****But notice what happens next** – they’re healed, they’re cleansed. Now, boys and girls, at this point in the story,**

how many return to Jesus after being healed by Him? Why don't you hold up your fingers to tell me how many returned? **Just one!** Only one returned to Jesus and said thank you, and he was a Samaritan! Those people who everyone else shunned and thought was worthless – that's who returned and thanked Jesus.

What do you think Jesus felt at that point? **When He says:** 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?' (Luke 17:17) – what was Jesus feeling? Why don't you tell whoever you're with what you think Jesus was feeling?

I think maybe Jesus was feeling a bit sad – sad that more people had not figured out who He was, that here was God, right with them, and He cared and listened to isolated and broken people.

So, what are you going to take away from our story today? I've got two quick ideas for you!

First of all, it's really clear that thankfulness is important, thankfulness to Jesus, and that's something the Bible teaches again and again. The Apostle Paul encouraged us to, 'Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Eph. 5:19-20)

I wonder, are you someone who's thankful? We shouldn't fake thankfulness, so if some of us are grieving, then our thankfulness will be different. We're also living in difficult times, uncertain times, is it possible to be thankful just now?

Well, we've got to remember, that the folks who wrote the Bible were writing in hard times themselves, yet, they were still thankful.

A man called Tom Wright, who is a Christian and writer, said this: '...our God is the giver of all things: every mouthful of food we take, every breath of air we inhale, every note of music we hear, every smile on the face of a friend, a child, a spouse – all that, and a million things more, are good gifts of his generosity. The world didn't need to be like this. It could have been far more drab.'
(Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, page 206)

In this time of isolation, in this time of food being harder to get, and the normal things being disrupted, maybe it will help us become more thankful for the things we often taken for granted.

So, why not, get into a rhythm of thanking God for the gifts of His generosity, maybe at the start or end of your day. Because the more we are people of thankfulness, the less likely we are to be people of anger or bitterness.

And if you'd like a new song to sing along to, one which is full of thankfulness, then try out Matt Mayer's song, 'Alive and Breathing' – it's a great song and really lifts my soul!

So, let's be a people who are thankful. Idea number two – **let's be people of faith yet honest** about our doubts. I'll get into this a bit more in our Tuesday Evening Sermon, but in verse 5, we see that the apostles, the close friends of Jesus, **say to Him: 'Increase our faith!'**

Here are the people that Jesus is training up, and they've seen lots of miracles already, yet they are struggling, their faith is not quite big enough. Then we read of the ten lepers, where faith in Jesus arises in the most unlikely of places – a Samaritan leper. It is that man who has the greatest faith – He recognises in Jesus that the God of all creation is here, He is near, and is full of loving kindness.

Having faith just now is hard, we have questions, but hard times do not mean faith cannot exist, or that faith is simply wishful thinking. I think it's possible to be honest with our doubts, and yet still be people of faith.

This week, I read a story out of Italy, of doctors in a hospital facing the most difficult situations, and into their midst came an elderly priest, vulnerable himself...

What that priest did, and how he did it, powerfully touched some of the staff in this hospital. When he arrived, they did not believe in God, but within two weeks faith arose within them because of that priest.

We all have doubts, we all like the disciples, have moments when we cry, ‘Lord, increase our faith!’ So, in this time of isolation, why not invest a little time in your relationship with God? **One idea is to join our online Bible reading plan – you can do it on a website or in the Bible app, and details will be on our website and Facebook page. There’s going to be one for adults, and another for older children and younger teens, so consider getting involved, encourage your children to get involved, and let’s be honest about our doubts, yet seek to grow in our relationship with God and so be a people of faith.**

Friends, as we journey with Jesus towards Easter, we see that He is the God of loving kindness, who comes close, ready to hear our doubts, increase our faith, and out of His abundant generosity give us good things, including Himself. Jesus is the God who gives Himself to us, He gave us Himself upon the Cross that we might not remain isolated from Him but be welcomed into His family and have a hope that is sure and steadfast, even in the most difficult of times.

**To Him, be all glory and thanks, now and forevermore.
Amen.**

We're going to close our time together with one of our favourite hymns for the closing service of the Boys and Girls Brigades, it's called "Will your anchor hold".