

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 12 October 2025, the 17th Sunday after Trinity

Collect (*the Church's prayer for today*):

Readings: 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17: 11-19

Today's reflection is by Reader, Pete Gillions.

The gospel account reminds us of how isolating illness can be, especially terminal illness. Illnesses like motor neurone disease or multiple sclerosis can, over time, rob people not only their health and independence but also of their place in society. As their condition deteriorates it may even rob them any hope for the future. You might ask could anything be worse than that? Actually, it can, That is when you are held responsible for your misfortune. That this is exactly happened at the height of the Aids crisis in the 1980s. Previously healthy young gay men were dying of an illness that attacked their immune system. There was real fear about how infectious this could be so individuals were isolated. Government adverts gave bleak warnings about the dangers of Aids. That is when Anderton, then the chief constable of Greater Manchester decided to speak out. He described himself as a committed Christian and felt a God-given responsibility to share his perspective. He outraged many by describing gay people as “swirling around in a cesspit of their own making”. Not only were the gay men ill and dying, it was entirely their own fault. Imagine lying on a hospital bed, isolated and without hope and then hearing that judgement. Step back into the gospel account and that is exactly what we see. A group of men, dying of a degenerative disease who were isolated from their community. They were viewed, at least by some of the religious community, as responsible for their situation. That they were under God's judgment for sin. It into this bleak situation that Jesus gives words of hope and the promise of a better future. What happens here tells us something not only about the what happened to the men with leprosy but also about the nature of God and the promise of hope for us all.

So let us step amongst this group of men. What would you find? It is likely you would be amongst people of all ages and backgrounds. We know that there were both Jews and Samaritans in the group. Developing leprosy had robbed you of your status, your home, your family, your place in the community. You had literally lost everything. Unable to work, you existed by begging. That each passing day was a struggle and you had long since given up all hope. Being ejected and ostracised was bad enough. What made it worse was you would seen by some as responsible for your situation, that you were under God's judgment for sin. What is it that is so awful about leprosy to cause such exclusion from society? Leprosy causes progressive damage to the nerves in the body, causing the inability to feel pain, leading to injuries and ulcers. You can burn or cut yourself without noticing. Over time it affects your sight, causing blindness, and muscle weakness impairs your breathing. It commonly leads to permanent disabilities such as clawed hands or other disfigurement. So it is easy to see how the fear of contagion leads to exclusion. In fact, leprosy was such a concern that it gets a special

mention in Leviticus, in the rules for life section of the Old Testament. In Leviticus 13 it describes in detail how the priest were responsible to diagnose the early symptoms of leprosy, which concludes - "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. Notice the bit about covering the upper lip – before face masks were around it was a simple way to stop contagion. As leprosy was incurable, the only reason someone might actually return to the priest would be if he had been misdiagnosed in the first place and now all symptoms had gone. Just as the priest could diagnose you as someone with leprosy he was also the one to re-examine you and declare you were now well.

So here you are, wandering with your nine companions along one day and you see a few people coming your way. As they get closer you recognise one of them, a man known to be a miracle worker, a healer. You have to maintain your distance so you shout over to him. 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' Rather than ignoring you, Jesus responds 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' You look at your companions and see the surprise and confusion on their faces. As we see from Leviticus, the only reason you would go to the priest if you were now well. You look at your companions. Nothing has changed. Maybe because he seems to have true authority or maybe because you have nothing to lose, you choose to obey Jesus' command to go to the priest. And as you journey you realise that healing is taking place, that you were getting better. Feeling was returning in your limbs. Your sight was getting restored. Strength was returning to your body. You watch you companions' claw hand begin to uncurl. You see backs and legs straighten. You cannot believe all that is happening to you and your companions. You have one focus: to find the priest, to be declared clean and return to your community. Where there was pain, now there is healing, where there was despair, now there is hope for a better future. You are truly healed and restored.

Then you notice one of your companions starting to turn back. You hear him praising God with a loud voice. He was the one Samaritan amongst you. You remember that he would not have worshipped at the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead Samaritans worshipped at their own Temple on Mount Gerizim. Maybe he is heading there. It is not your concern – you are focussed on getting to Jerusalem. But the Samaritan did not head for Mount Gerazim. He went to Jesus. He saw that Jesus was more than a healer. He recognised that Jesus was nothing less than God and worthy of worship. And so we read that 'He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him'.

It continues "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.'

Luke is making a sharp point here. It is the outsider, the Samaritan who had had leprosy, who was the only one to recognise that Jesus was nothing less than God himself. And this is confirmed as Jesus says "Your faith has made you well'. The Greek

words convey the fuller meaning, “faith has brought you salvation”. Faith has brought you to into a new relationship with God and His Kingdom in Christ. Yes, he is grateful for his healing. But in his thanks and praise he looks beyond his healing to the healer, to Jesus and gives thanks.

So what does this mean for us today. What frames this whole encounter is the opening line “Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem”. Here we see Jesus’ unwavering determination to fulfil God’s mission. Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem even knowing it would lead to His suffering and death. The love of God in Christ is to be found there in those few words “Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem”. Secondly Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. The Samaritans had Jewish ancestry but were despised as having left the true faith. They now worshipped at their own Temple on Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem. Observant Jews would avoid travelling through Samaria. Yet Jesus choose not only to go that way but to engage with an even more excluded group – the ten men with leprosy. When they called out ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’, the love of God in Christ is to be found in His engagement with the most excluded. The love of God in Christ is to be found in there in those few words ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’

Here’s the thing. No one has ever come to God with that request ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ and not received the mercy of God. I’ll say that again: No one has ever come to God with that request ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ and not received the mercy of God. That might appear glib – you might recall the many times you have prayed for something and yet things got worse, not better. Where was the mercy of God then? To see that, we need to consider the healed man who returned to Jesus. He didn’t just return in thankfulness for the healing, he returned to praise the healer. The love of God is seen in recognising that Christ is God in human form. Our assurance is that Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.

What this healing does is give us a glimpse into the future, to that day when all things will be restored, when sorrow and sighing will be no more. That is our hope, that is our destiny, that is God’s mercy for each of us.

Amen