

**18 Pentecost  
October 9, 2022**

Giving thanks can turn our life around and lead us to wellness, wholeness and shapes out thoughts and actions.

Readings: Luke 17:11 - 19

**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts,  
be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our savior for whom we give thanks. Amen.**

**Sermon by Michael D. Moore, M.Div.**

Did anyone see the big, bold headlines on last Sunday's Florida Times-Union? The two words were repeated often by media. "Biblical Destruction," a reference to H. Ian. I'd prefer a different adjective. Biblical is a bit unfair - like an "Act of God." This wording would be fine "if" balanced, like using this Biblical adjective for positive acts too. We'd like to hear of "Biblical Compassion", or "Biblical Love" as shown by the Cajun Navy. But negative news grabs attention.

So, since it does, our story today is titled "Biblical Disobedience. "Today we hear of the one who was willfully disobedient to Jesus. Nine followed his instructions but one refused to do as told. Today we may say, "And yet he persisted."

The one, having leprosy, a common affliction of the day, should be granted grace and mercy to do as he pleased. But the social convention of his day said "no." There were prescribed roles for leprosy, like the roles today for the + COVID pts.

The Book of Leviticus devotes two whole chapters teaching priest how to diagnose diseases of the skin, how to pronounce lepers ritually unclean and how to perform rites of purification should they be healed. Lepers, not people with leprosy, were told their place in society: wear torn clothes, let the hair of head hang loose, cover your lips and cry, "Unclean, unclean." Those with this dreaded disease are to dwell alone in the habitat outside the camp; banished beyond sight. Perhaps they were as frightening to others as COVID was initially. UP

Leprosy was not a seen as punishment for sin. It was seen as an Act of God. If there was nothing you "did" to deserve leprosy, then it followed, there was nothing you could "do" to

cure it. Lepers were shunned because their disease was contagious, again much like COVID. But it was more than that. It was their pain, their loneliness, the unspeakable fear – for no one wanted to be infected. All kept their distance; they were barred from the religious community and declared unworthy of God. They were the unclean not to be with or near the clean ones. They live over there, we live over here. God knows we feel for them, but *you've got to be sensible about these things*.

None of these expectations were challenged by the leprosy victims themselves. To challenge the social order, after all, was not wise. Lepers could **not** work, and must depend upon the kindness of others, their charity. So, they dressed as they were told, spoke as they were told, did not cross over the line that had been drawn to separate them from those with unblemished skin. They were obedient. They followed their orders, and even when Jesus, the well-known healer, came to town; they did as expected, not breaking social convention. They stood at the proper distance and said the proper things. "Jesus, Master, Have mercy on us."

So, Jesus looked at them and saw what "anyone" would see, that they were ravaged by leprosy and needed all the mercy they could get. He did not touch them, there was no mud, no spittle, and no talk of faith this time, just an order: "Go and show yourselves to the priests," said Jesus. And they did, disappearing as obediently as they had appeared in the first place.

None of them asked why, yet, they knew why. There was only one reason to go see the priest and that was to receive a diagnosis, a verdict, clean or unclean, in or out, community member or beggar on the outskirts of town. None of them asked why. BUT they did as they were told – then behold – on the way they were cleansed. The scabs fell away, the color returned as did feeling into limbs that had been numb for years. So, now they must have the priest in Jerusalem certify their cures and restore them to the community- a neg. COVID test.

Being the "go along to get along" types, all but one did. That one did not do as he was told. The ONE, when he saw that he was healed, cried out, turned back, and did not rest until he lay on his face in the dirt at the feet of Jesus, praising God and giving thanks. He made a spectacle of himself.

It was all the more so, once he was recognized as the Samaritan, a believer only in the Torah. He was but a Gentile and Foreigner as far as the House of David was concerned. He was

in other words, a double outsider, once because his leprosy and a second time because of his non-Jewish blood - a double loser laying at the feet of Jesus and “yet he persisted” in giving “thanks.”

He acted as if God were somehow present in this man, and somehow revealed in his presence. He was one of the unclean who could see what the clean could not see. He was the one who refused to be separated from the Healer who gave him life.

The story suggests this unclean one had an effect on Jesus. Something happened. All of a sudden Jesus is asking questions. “Weren’t there ten lepers here, Jesus asks? Where are the other nine? Is this foreigner the only one who says thanks?” Then, Jesus turned to the healed one and says, “Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.” Your faith has saved you.

Luke, a doctor, and an author has chosen his words wisely. He describes the moment of realization for the Samaritan. The words used are more than he is healed, it is different, more dramatic, more than just being cleansed. Jesus’ words “Your faith has made you well” means saved or whole. With these words, Luke is saying, “Though ALL are cleansed, only ONE - is made whole.”

Once you stop to think about it, this is all very odd. Didn't Jesus tell all ten to go show themselves to the priest? And didn't nine do what they were told? Didn't this one, in fact, not do what he was told, an act of “Biblical Disobedience?” Then how come this one making a scene gets special treatment, gets told his faith had made him well, even though all ten were healed? What's going on here?

Ten were healed of their diseases, but only one was wholly saved. Ten were declared clean and restored, but only one was said to have faith. Ten set out for Jerusalem to certify their healing – as they were told by Jesus, but only one turned back to give thanks. Nine behaved like good lepers, good Jews; only one, a double loser, behaved like a man in love, a man willing to be biblically disobedient.

I admit, I am more like the nine. I am obedient. I know how to follow. I do not know how to be like the one. Being “Biblically Disobedient” is not a resource I can easily find in my toolbox.

Being “Biblical Obedient” comes easier. I followed the road to holy orders as a priest. Studying scriptures, saying my prayers, acting on my faith and paying my tithe are in my toolbox. And there's nothing wrong with that - nothing at all. It is the kind of steady law-abiding discipleship - the discipleship of the nine lepers, this is what has kept the great ship of the Church afloat for thousands of years. I'm clearly one of the nine, but it's the 10th leper – he intrigues me.

The outsider, the double loser captures my imagination - the one whose disease I fear, much like COVID. It is his passion that surprises me. In truth I may never see people like him in church - because he does not need a priest to certify his cure – his wholeness. He is free to go directly to God.

Where are the nine Jesus asked, we know where they are, gone to the priest. Where is the one leper now?” That is what I want to know. Where is the wayward one who failed to go along with the crowd, the impulsive one who fell of his face in the dirt, the fanatical one who loved God so much that obedience was beside the point? Where did that one go? Who is he? What does he know that we do not know?

Maybe we know *after all*. He is the one who followed his “heart instead of his instructions,” the one who accepted his life as gift and gave it back again. He is the one whose thanksgiving rose up from somewhere so deep inside him that it turned him around and lead him to Jesus, made him whole?”

Maybe what we see in him is “thanksgiving,” that crucial ingredient to the healing of one’s soul; maybe he knew that giving thanks is the path to new life and wholeness. Who would have thought? I can hardly imagine what it is like to **be thankful enough** – to be disobedient - - to act as this one did. I pray we all understand this attitude of gratitude and see it make us whole. This I believe is the Word of the Lord. Amen.

---

For ideas and inspiration, I am indented to The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor and her sermon “The Tenth Leper” as published in her book, “The Preaching Life.”