

‘Twice Healed’

Rev Dr. Richard Topping

Luke

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And then Jesus said to him, “go on your way, for your faith has made you well”.

It was Sunday right after Church, and I was in my office in Montreal, taking off my clerical collar, and this gnarly looking fellow showed up at the side door of the church, and i heard him say, could i speak to the minister? So I brought him into my office with a couple of other people from the church. His hair was shaved right down to the skull, he looked disheveled and he wore an arm bracelet from the Montreal General Hospital.

He said that he just finished radiation treatment and that he needed money to get back to his home near Quebec City where he lived. With the church please, help me, he said. I don’t know where he got the idea that you should come to church for help, but he did have that idea. The guy really looked like somebody who’s just finished radiation, he looked weak and gaut, and grey and not really dressed for the weather. It was the hospital bracelet that really clinched it for me. He looked pitiful. But then he said a line and a I’ve heard it a million times, he said, if you just loan me the money and I’ll pay you back. And i kind of wished, he wouldn’t have said that, what are the chances of it ever happening.

So we went down to the train station on a Sunday afternoon, the ticket was purchased, he boarded the train and kept saying, thank you! thank you!, i’ll pay you back some day. He left on the train for Quebec City. He got treated for his disease, he got a free ticket, and now he’s on his way home. Is anything like the rest of us once he feels better again, he’ll go back to his old life, you know how those rash promises you make when you’re sick and then when you feel better you forget all about it and you’ll go back to how it was.

Like the ten lepers in our story from Luke, this man came looking for mercy. And that’s mercy if you’re looking for, who do you go to? Jesus, master, have mercy on us. Would we pray that lately, don’t we? Sometimes, we almost scream at help, volume all these guys who got so and they ramp up their request. People seem to know that if it’s mercy you’re after, best take your stuff, your church, your people, your situation to Jesus.

Sometimes Jesus, and his people wii get close to you even when its dangerous. Martin Luther, I remember said to pastors, Martin Luther the reformer in the time of plague, here’s what he said to pastors, he said “fumigate, but don’t flee, take precautions, but don’t run from the flock, be careful, be merciful. Mercy is what Jesus is all about and Jesus mission continues, even sometimes during social distancing, even in quarantine.

At least ten men are in desperate straits, forced together, Jew and Samaritan by their common contagious disease. Luke makes a big point about how they are on the edge of town. That’s where people afflicted with leprosy lived, away from home and family and worship. They’re kept in these makeshift shelters along the road side, the edge of the town, that’s where the garbage dump was, and if there was fire, it would burn, and consume it. It’s actually, where we get the word for help ‘gahana’, that’s the garbage dump, outside of Jerusalem.

The edge of town was the sort of ancient isolation ward. Nothing more to be done, for them. So for the sake of those who don’t yet have what they have outweigh from polite society, is the best place to store such human ruling. Sickness delights! So, from a safe antiseptic distance, these ten men call out for mercy

to passers by. If they are Lucky, they might get some scraps of food, perhaps a bit of clothing left for them, some might even be moved by compassion and ease their ministry and ease ways while they are wasted away. Luke doesn't say how these guys knew Jesus was walking by, but these ten sick, ostracized men have Jesus name. Maybe they have heard rumours of healing, maybe they overheard that Jesus has mercy for outsiders, cast outs, lost causes.

Luke has Jesus always working beside of the road and even venturing into graveyards, and on a number of occasions. Talks about lost causes. Maybe, maybe this is what the creed means. When it says, Jesus descended into hell. A strange, how, desperation can get you wondering, whether there might be truth to the rumour. Jesus seem to thrive around hopeless situations, around folks whom everyone else have given up on. I think people show up in church suspecting, maybe not quite believing that mercy might be found here, in Jesus name. I suspect that it's for mercy's sake, that some of you found your way here today. Maybe, maybe church is our way of connecting our addictions, our endless cycles of self-destructive behaviour, our desperate situations, our despair at the state of the world, our fatigue, and Jesus mercy.

We come to know with greater or lesser certainty that Jesus is merciful, that he descends into our hells, so that when trouble meets us, we meet him. And so some of us today, maybe whisper, some of us are ready to yell out and hoping, we got it right, Jesus, master, have mercy on us, have mercy on our world.

May have told you this story before, but i remember visiting a woman from my congregation from Montreal, in the hospital who had and was dying. Martina was her name. I came in one morning and Martina said to me, "Richard, last night i thought i was going to die, i've never felt so alone in all my life." What do you say? And then she continued, she said "then I remembered Jesus' words on the Cross. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." And she said, i knew he'd been where I was.

Wow! Jesus does have mercy on us, and on these ten lepers. He comes to us in our hells and you notice there a open ended request, gets the more than they bargained for. I mean, if they would have spelled out the kind of mercy they wanted, a little food, clothes and maybe some spare change they could have seriously underbid the gift.

What they get out of a general cry for mercy from Jesus is, get healed, abundant mercy. Jesus says, "go and show yourselves to the priests, go and act like healed people and you'll be healed people." And with nothing to lose, the leprosy they head off in the direction of the priests, and it happens, they stopped on the road, and as they go there, they are healed.

Can you imagine what that must have been like? The colour of your skin restored, sores, peeled over fingers restored, feeling coming back to numb limb, limbs. It must have been incredible!

Nine, of the ten exactly do what they are told. They follow the rules, they are obedient, and compliant, they go directly to the temple, are pronounced clean, restored to the society, they go back to normal. What they wanted the most, they got. As they went, says Luke, they were cleansed. Now it's a very particular word that Luke uses here. They were made ritually pure, certified grade 'A' unblemished. What it means is that, they got their health back, they can go back to their families, their community, put themselves back once again into social circulation.

I mean, we now know, that's huge! Health can mean a full order of life. Children can be picked up and hugged, and spouses can be embraced, friends can be visited with, you can sleep in your bed again. See! Jesus mercy needs not just nice teeth, and good hair, but human community. The mercy of Jesus radiates outward. To restore not just individual lives but networks of human society. Each healed man becomes a source of joy. The whole groups of people. See, when Jesus reassembles life, when he plants hope and grants a future by his healing mercy it changes the world.

Now I'd be happy if Luke's story ended right there. Wouldn't you? Wow! Jesus is merciful, Jesus touches the desperate people, puts them on their feet, thanks be to God that would encourage us all in ministry, we could get on with our day, and go home, and eat turkey.

And yet, you notice the healing of the ten isn't even the main point of the story. The thrust of the story concerns one man who can't follow directions. While the other men bustle off to the priest and get back into the social circulation, without delay one man, an outsider, a Samaritan, and a rogue, returns back to Jesus. Just like the rest he's healed, just like the rest he went on his way and a miracle happened, but unlike the rest of them, he turns around and goes back to the source of his healing.

I mean, I can just imagine, on the way he belts out the verse "in Christ alone my hope is found", maybe he takes up that old chestnut. "Joyful, joyful, for a good measure we adore Jesus". When he gets to Jesus, he bows low to the ground and he's all effusive. Thanks, thank you, Oh! thank you so much. And Luke says, he is really loud and it's a bit of a spectacle, he refuses to be stopped, he's emotional, this not a Presbyterian service. But have you ever noticed, how gratitude, kinda gets a little out of hand. It can be demonstrative, loud, and excessive. Gratitude grips this man heart and soul in posture and verse. He just gotta to sing to God, because prose can't carry the luggage of his oh! awesome joy.

He's got to say thanks today, now. Gratitude can't wait until he attends to others matters. Have you ever noticed, that gratitude delayed is just usually ingratitude. I'll do that, next week. Next week never comes. Not this guy. He's all pumped up with thankfulness and he got to let it out in front of the right audience, and that audience is Jesus.

And Jesus says, "so, where is everybody?" Didn't ten people ask for mercy, just like you? You're not even one of us, a Jew. You don't frequent the synagogue, you Samaritan. where are the people? Who should know better than to be ungrateful for God's merciful acts.

There should be an SATB clean choir, clean complexion choir here. Singing 'Glory to God, and all we get is like a Samaritan solo?' What happened we might ask, why don't more people acknowledge that the source of strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow is Jesus. And Jesus poses the question, was nobody found to be returned and praise God, except for this Samaritan? What's wrong with you, other nine? We thought we'd see a little gratitude. Why is it that the majority is so, what should we call it 'doxologically challenged'. So praise redissent.

It puzzles even Jesus. This lack of gratitude amongst people who often know better. They enjoy, enjoy the gifts of God and they forgot who gave the gifts. And then Jesus pronounces a strange word on the singing Samaritan. "Rise! and go on your way, for your faith has made you well." What? Your faith has made you well. Get up off the ground and get back in the game, your faith has made you well.

Now, hang on! I thought he was already well. I mean, the sores are gone, the fingers are back, the future is an open book, he can go back to his family. What does Jesus mean? Rise up! Your faith has made you well? He's already cleansed, he's already asked for mercy and he got it. Jesus cleansed him already. Here's the question! Can a man or a woman be twice healed?

Apparently, Yes!

And what's more, Saint Luke seems to be telling us that the second healing is more significant than the first. There's more to life than a clean build of health, and easy social circulation, although believe me, they are joys. See, the high point of the story isn't a healing that makes somebody normal. I mean, what a shame it would be. Jesus, the son of God, the second person of the Trinity and get nothing out of it, but like, normal.

Imagine, getting a whole new situation and just going back to the way it was before. The man who returns, he gets a deeper gift, he moves forward. It's Easter for him. See, he gets healed, but he also gets saved. The word translated 'well' here in Greek, listen to the word 'sotzo' means, rescued, delivered, saved, made whole in the most profound sense.

See! His healing was more than limbs and looks. It was Easter, he's been raised by Jesus, to really live, and to be alive to be well, is to be grateful to the God who gives life through Jesus Christ, in every time. See! He's not just alive now, he's well in the truest sense of the term. He's awake to God, the Lord, and giver of life. And you could always spot a twice healed person, by their excessive heartfelt gratitude to God. To get touched by God, it makes you get all, feel logical, doxo logical.

I remember visiting Bruce, a man dying of cancer in two days to live. The previous year, they didn't think Bruce would make it. But the cancer went into remission, and by God's grace he got an extra year. In my final visit of that extra year, i said "Hey Bruce! can I pray for you before i leave?" And he said, "Yes! but just a minute. Let me give you my final confession. "Richard i have to tell you, this past year of my life has been the best year I've ever had, i never been so in love with my wife, I've seen flowers in a way, well! I've never seen before. Full of beauty, spectacular, to behold, he said, I stop and touch flowers".

He said, the sunlight in the gardens, in the green of trees, wow! He said, i stand in awe of this unbelievable world. And then he said this to me, "you can pray for me now, but don't ask God for anything. Just offer a prayer of thanks for this last year of my life." Wow! He's got a year of reprieve on his health, but he got more importantly i think, he got raised up, i think he got Easter well. For all eternity.

See, i think that's Luke point here. Healing is just grateful, health is wonderful. But do we get to this stage in our lives where we can trace our multiple blessings to the giver of all gifts. We are not well yet. We are liable in a culture like this, to just thank ourselves. We are liable to think that everything we've have, we earned, and man, it makes us unbearable people.

Nine people met Jesus, got normal, and went home. Back to the way it used to be. I'd imagine, they all had 1.3 children, and got an account on facebook. One man met Jesus, was healed and he was raised from the dead. Gratitude moved him to worship and praise and never was he so alive. Jesus says, unlike the ungrateful nine, he was alive, he was saved, for a life that will never run out.

In conclusion, i should let you know that before i left Montreal, after service a man shook my hand at the door, and i even asked him to sign in the guest book, because i don't remember ever seeing him before. He said, don't you remember me? I said, "sorry, i don't remember much, I'm sixty, I write everything down." He said, listen "don't you remember me?" I came down from Montreal General Hospital, i was messed and asked you to help me to get to Quebec City. His hair was back, his face was full, and he wore a tie, he looked like normal. He said, i came to church today to worship with you. I am well again and i am here to keep my promise. This morning i put a cheque on the plate to repay you and then some. I am just so grateful to God to have my health back.

Now, i am not naïve. I know this sort of this doesn't happen everyday. Even Saint, St Luke, thinks that the chances are about one in ten. Friends give thanks to the Lord. For He is good.
Amen!