

Your Faith Has Made You Well
By Jason Huff
2 Kings 5:1-17, Psalm 107:17-22, Luke 17:11-19

Our final Scripture lesson today is from Luke 17:11-19. Listen now to God's Word. "Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

This morning, I want to ask you to imagine something with me. Close your eyes if you need to. I want you to picture this...you are in a fancy restaurant...tablecloths on the table, formal china, elegant lighting. The servers are in top form in starched black and white. Your waiter comes by and brings you your entrée...a big, juicy steak. Got that in mind? All right. Now tell me something...how many of you were having filet mignon? How many of you were having a porterhouse? How about a T-Bone? Is anyone brave enough to admit that when you heard "steak," you thought, "ooo, no thanks?" All of us heard the same story and had the same illustrations in mind. But that one word "steak" created a ton of options in our minds.

Faith is another word that creates different pictures in our minds, just like that picture of steak. I have faith that my microphone works every Sunday...because if it doesn't, nobody tells me! I have faith that when I leave today, I'll be able to go to my car and it will start. We have faith in lots of people – faith that the doctor has made the right diagnosis, faith that the car salesman really is giving me a good deal, faith that my son's teacher is instructing him well. Faith may mean we believe something to be true in our heads or trust others around us, but when we say these things about God, they take on a new meaning. A lot of folks in today's passage show some form of faith. But through the story of the Samaritan leper we find the truest, deepest meaning of faith, the faith that shows we are children of God under the mercy of His salvation.

In today's story, Jesus is traveling with His disciples, and He's just about to enter a village when ten lepers approach. We've seen lepers before in the Gospel of Luke, but it's good to remind ourselves of their plight. "Lepers" included anyone with a skin disease, not just modern leprosy. They were unclean as far as Jewish law was concerned, and the law said that they could not enter a village or inhabited area – that's why Jesus meets them on the outskirts of town. Most people of that day considered them to be cursed by God, probably for something they or their families did. They were on the ragged edge of Jewish society, and they stand far away from Jesus to avoid making Him unclean.

Now these lepers were surprisingly different. Most people called Jesus "teacher" or "rabbi." Only His disciples called Him "master." For the lepers to have used this term meant that they knew who He was. His fame had spread. They know He has divine power and authority to heal them, and they have enough faith to use a title that gives Jesus honor.

But then Jesus does something unique. He doesn't heal them on the spot. Now there are other times that Jesus does healings from afar, but that's not what's happening here. Jesus says, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." When He says this, you can just imagine the group sitting there saying, "Huh?" By Jewish law, a leper didn't show himself to a priest until the skin ailment was gone. *Then* the priest examined you and gave you a certificate that you were clean. Jesus seems to have forgotten a step! It was very reminiscent of the story of Naaman, a commander of an army that was a rival to Israel, whose story we heard this morning. And like Naaman, I imagine the lepers were baffled by what Jesus was saying. Doesn't He have to say some words or do some magic or something? But what Jesus was really saying was this – "you are already healed." They just didn't realize it yet. But they had faith...faith enough to go and do what Jesus said. There's no doubting they had a measure of trust to head off to the local synagogue even while their disease was readily apparent.

The ten head out towards the synagogue, and as we expect, they are healed. By now, this is no surprise to those of us who've been studying Luke's gospel. But then we see something else. One of the ten lepers comes back. In fact, he hasn't made it to the synagogue; he's still ritually unclean by technicality. But he doesn't seem to care! He is praising God with all His might; nobody could avoid hearing it. He falls at Jesus' feet in a show of complete submission to Him, and he thanks Jesus – doing so in that culture showed his debt and obligation to Jesus. We're glad to hear about it, but again, it seems just like the right thing to do. Then Luke throws the wrench into the story – this former leper also turned out to be a Samaritan. Hated by the Jews as the descendants of the ancient unfaithful contingent of Israel who intermarried with the locals and worshiped other gods, their theology was messed up and they were seen as unredeemable. The one guy of the ten who everyone expected was doubly cursed, the one who no one would respect as being a follower of the true God, he's the one who gets it right.

Jesus is a little saddened by the whole situation...not that the one came back, but that the nine Israelites didn't. Those who thought they knew God because of their status as Hebrews didn't give God the honor due Him...and this foreigner did. Because of that, Jesus makes a statement to the Samaritan that is profound..."Get up and go; your faith has made you well." That final phrase means more than our interpretation, though. The word Jesus uses is *sozo*, which can mean "cured" or "made well." But *sozo* also is a word that means "saved" or "delivered." It's the word that is used for salvation from sin, the salvation that Jesus brings. There's a double meaning here that doesn't come through in English. His faith has made him well just like the faith of the other nine; all ten have been healed. But this one, the one who returned to acknowledge God, his faith has saved him. His trust in Jesus as the Savior, the Christ, brings him to a point of eternal redemption. His faith is something different from the faith of the other nine.

So what is it? What leads this foreigner with even a confused understanding of God to salvation? Here's where his faith differs from those of those around him in three ways. *His faith is relational. His faith is unashamed. His faith is wholly grounded in abandoning himself to Jesus.* These three things are what Jesus commends when He says, "Your faith has made you well."

First, the man's faith is relational rather than selfish. Let's be honest...no one can sit in judgment of the other nine for doing what they did. Living the life of a leper was a nightmare. You were a social pariah who survived only on the kindness of others. Suddenly, they are presented with a second chance...they can go home, return to a normal life, have a family, regain their status, no more being the outcast. If you'd lived months or years or decades in exile from family and friends and a constructive life, you'd want to get back to some semblance of reality as soon as possible. We can only imagine that they raced to the synagogue so that they might get back to their old lives. I imagine that many of us might do the same thing.

Let's also remember that they had faith of a kind many of us share. They had faith to ask Jesus for healing; they even had enough faith to call Him "master." What's more, they had faith enough to go find the priests while they were not yet showing signs of a cure. They took a leap of faith. And yet, their faith was ultimately self-interested; their faith served their own needs without regard for the one in whom they placed their trust. Sure, they had to get home to family and friends and fields. They may have even thought that the sacrifices that were a part of the ritual of being declared clean from leprosy were enough to satisfy God. But we get no sense of this. This was a small village; if the nine had started praising God eventually for their healing, Jesus and the disciples would have learned about it. Ultimately, while they may have been grateful for their healing, their own lives got in the way of their gratitude.

But the Samaritan leper is different. When he sees that he has been healed, he returns to Jesus without even going all the way to the synagogue. He delays his own entry back into his community to make certain he shows his gratitude to Jesus. His first instinct is not to serve himself but to serve the One who has healed him. He wants to be in relationship with Jesus, in relationship with the God who has cured him not only of his sickness but of his isolation and his shame. It's not that he's that different than everyone else; he would have wanted to get back to "real life" too. But his priorities are straight. His faith isn't about what God can do for him; his faith is about living a life of thanksgiving for what God has already done. When he lives this kind of faith, his own needs are met just like those of the nine who are focused on themselves.

Reading about this man's faith convicts me about my own priorities. You know, I come to the church every day and see floppy shingles on the roof, and I pray that we might find the financing to get those fixed. Some days, I'm focused on getting the roof fixed so that we can have many more years of ministry in this building following Jesus' lead. But other days, I admit I pray about them because I happen to love my job and would like to keep it. There are days that I pray this church will grow so that the people of Macomb who don't know Jesus as Savior and Lord will come here and find salvation through Him. And there are days I pray that the church will grow more because I'd like to look like a successful pastor. But the truth is, God doesn't really care about successful pastors keeping their jobs. He cares about faithful followers who will stick with Him no matter what circumstances come along, who are more concerned about His Kingdom than their own needs that God has already promised to provide. The example of the Samaritan leper shows us that we can be God-centered rather than me-centered. A faith that is about what God can do for me is going to fail when God eventually doesn't give me what I want. A faith based in a real relationship with God can succeed because it's not contingent on anything but simply abounds in the grace and mercy and forgiveness that God has already shown us and pours out even now and promises to lavish on us through eternity.

Second, the man's faith is unashamed. He's shouting it around to anyone that would listen that God has healed Him and praising God. This might spark visions of some loud guy on the street corner yelling at us about the apocalypse, but this is different. We know that the Pharisees have turned against Jesus, ridiculing not only His teachings but Him as a person. We're not even two chapters away from the Passion Week, where Jesus enters Jerusalem and is finally betrayed into the hands of His enemies. This man is taking a risk in proclaiming God's power through Jesus. In his healing he might have some possibility of restored social position; his best option for restoration into the community would have been to lay low, go to the priests, and keep quiet. But he isn't willing to do that. God has healed him, and he wants the world to know.

In our time, going around Partridge Creek and shouting at the top of your lungs is just going to get security to come after you. That's not gonna work. But an unashamed faith should fit the culture we live in. Earlier in Luke, we studied where Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God." He also said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory." Proclaiming the good news of Jesus without shame is part of saving faith.

So what does it look like today? It's characterized by a life defined by the fruits of the Spirit. If we are living as Christians, Galatians 5 tells us we should see fruits such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Just acting these out in our society will make you stand out for faith. The unashamed part comes when someone asks you why you are the way you are. It's easy to be all "ah shucks" about it, but the best thing to say is, "The only way I can live the way I do is through the power of Jesus Christ." The world doesn't need a lot of really loud people saying that Jesus is Lord so much as it needs people living out Jesus as their Lord and then confessing Him when the time is right. It's not one or the other but both.

This too is an area where I feel conviction. For the most part, I easily talk about Jesus in conversations with people I know. But when I'm meeting someone for the first time, I'm always feeling them out, seeing what they think, trying not to burst their bubble too soon. Am I going to be too conservative for them? Too liberal? Are they going to like me? Because I don't know about you, but I *like* being liked. But those concerns can hinder my witness. Am I ashamed about the things Jesus said and did? Or am I willing to be rejected in order to stand up for truth? When we stand up for Jesus, just by repeating the words of the Bible, we'll offend those who have placed their trust in anything else. But when we look at the Samaritan leper, we don't see him picking a fight about theology or explaining how or why he was healed. He simply praised God and told everyone the most important thing – *who* it was that had healed Him. He was not ashamed of Jesus. And we shouldn't be either.

The final point of the man's saving faith: his faith is wholly grounded in abandoning himself to Jesus. The man doesn't know the finer points of Jewish theology; in fact, as a Samaritan, his belief system was seen as substandard at best. He probably didn't worship in Jerusalem or keep the Jewish law perfectly. But there's one thing he knows: Jesus is his master, the One who has the power to heal as only God does, and he lays his life before Jesus...literally.

The Samaritan leper humbles himself in the basest way a person could in that day. He lays down prostrate before Jesus in a position of total submission and worship. He also thanks Jesus. Now when I go out after service today and get a cookie or a Coke or whatever, when somebody hands it to me, I'm going to say "thank you." But in the ancient near east, thanking a person obligated you to that person. You owed a significant debt to them; it wasn't done lightly. The Samaritan calls Jesus master and shows that he means it. Many people were healed by Jesus, but few worshiped him as this man did. He wasn't a Jew; He wasn't an heir to the promises made to Israel; yet through Jesus, he knew God far more intimately than they did.

Once again, it's convicting. I can say I love Jesus, and I do, as much as I understand what it means to say it. I attempt to serve Him by my actions, and yet, I have a lot of faith in myself. I'm an American, which means that no matter where I'm employed or who I'm married to, I'm my own boss and I make my own decisions and I don't like it when anybody tries to usurp my authority, particularly about myself. But following Jesus means willingly giving up that faith in myself to trust in Him. Because when I really get down to it, I am a weak person. Every talent and gift I have, I have because of Jesus and not something I've given myself. Even my ability to work hard and grow those talents comes from God. And so even now, I still am learning to ground my faith not in myself and what I can do but in Jesus and what He has already done and is still doing.

If my faith is wholly grounded in the person of Jesus, then I've got to know Jesus. The way I do that is through prayer and reading the Bible. I don't have to read a lot of the Bible each day to know Jesus, but the Bible is the only way to ground myself in Him. When I pray, honestly, if I'm distracted or bored or tempted, I can tune out God and substitute in what I'd like to hear. But when I come back to the Bible, here Jesus is, unchanging, unyielding, and yet still inviting me into a deeper relationship with Him. I may not understand everything about God, but Jesus in John 14:9 says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." When we give ourselves over to Jesus and meet Him in prayer and in reading His words and teachings, our relationship is not just with Him but with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Submitting to that on a regular, even daily basis is hard, but it's the same thing that the Samaritan did by falling at Jesus' feet. He gave himself over to Jesus, and in the process found salvation. When we follow Jesus and give ourselves over to Him, abandoning our own lives to His life within us, we find that God gives us back our lives, cleansed, made whole, and perfected through the power of His Son through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This morning, we've talked about a lot of different meanings of the word "faith." Sometimes it's just a belief that something is true; other times it's a trust in something or someone. But the faith we saw in the Samaritan leper who was healed was characterized by unashamed passion for God, thanksgiving rather than selfishness, and abandonment to Jesus Christ. That's the kind of faith that Jesus says leads to salvation. Why settle for hamburger when you can have a filet? Why settle for a weak faith when you can have faith that endures into eternity? Let us be convicted today not to settle for anything less than the faith that will make us well, both now and forevermore.