

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Only One Returned

Lesson: Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy^(a) met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

My family and I sometimes go out for a special meal a few times a year. It's usually for birthdays or our wedding anniversary. On those days, we tend to look for a restaurant with a nice atmosphere.

A few weeks ago, on my birthday, I decided that instead of going somewhere fancy, I wanted to try something truly different—something I had never tasted before. I realized that although I've always been curious about Chinese food, I had actually never eaten authentic Chinese cuisine in my life.

I love Panda Express, especially their Orange Chicken. But now I'm not talking about Americanized Chinese food like Panda Express or even the Korean-style Chinese dishes I grew up with. I wanted to try *real*, traditional Chinese food that hadn't been adjusted to fit anyone else's taste.

So I searched online and found a well-known traditional Chinese restaurant in the city. The reviews were excellent, so my family and I went there to celebrate my birthday. We ordered a few of the dishes people highly recommended.

To be honest, I used to think I had already experienced most of the world's flavors. I thought it would be hard to surprise my taste buds anymore—until that meal. The moment I took my first bite, I realized how wrong I had been. I felt like a frog that had been living in a well, suddenly seeing the ocean for the first time. The food used spices and aromas I had never encountered before. It felt strange and

mysterious, almost as if I had been transported to a small village somewhere in China.

At first, I wasn't sure I had made the right choice. I even wondered if Chinese food was really a good idea for my birthday. But as I kept eating, my taste buds began to adjust—and soon, I started to love it. The funny thing is, the very next morning, the first thing I wanted was to eat that food again. Since then, I've gone back to that restaurant two more times!

Anyway, after that birthday dinner, my family and I took a walk in a nearby park to help digest the food. As we walked, I began to feel a little warm—and a bit like I needed something sweet. I thought, “Some ice cream would be perfect right now.” Just then, we saw an ice cream truck in the distance! So we walked over and ordered a strawberry cheesecake ice creams.

When I tapped my card to pay, the screen popped up asking for a tip—20%, 25%, or 30%. I know some of you are kind enough to leave a tip even at an ice cream truck. But as I looked at that screen, I could feel my blood pressure rising a little. If I were sitting at a restaurant and being served, I'd gladly pay a tip. But this time, I was standing, ordering at a window, and the guy just scooped my ice cream. That was it!

I didn't really feel thankful—honestly, I was more worried that if I didn't leave a tip, my ice cream might end up smaller than it should be! After a few seconds of inner debate, I left a 20% tip—because, well, it was my birthday.

But I asked myself later, “Was I thankful that day?” I had plenty of reasons to be grateful, but I didn't *feel* thankful.

That story got a bit long, didn't it? Today's passage is the story of the ten lepers from Luke 17. The painting you see on the screen is by a German artist named Gerhardt Fugel. It's called *Christ and the Lepers*.

Fugel captured the exact moment when the ten men stretch out their hands and cry out desperately to Jesus for mercy. It was on Jesus' final journey toward Jerusalem—on His way to the cross. At that moment, the path of the dying Savior met the cries of those longing to live.

Behind Jesus were His disciples. They witnessed both Jesus, who was walking toward His death, and the lepers, who were pleading for life. Yet their minds were still filled with thoughts of who among them was the greatest. Still, they followed

Him, perhaps without full understanding, but knowing that Jesus was their only hope. In this single scene, three worlds meet: the suffering lepers, the self-centered disciples, and the compassionate Christ.

If you look closely at the painting, you'll notice the lepers are all facing the same direction. They are looking toward Jesus. Their faith was the kind that *cries out*. Friends, when we cry out to God—when we say, “I’m hurting,” or “I need help”—that’s where salvation begins.

According to Jewish law, lepers had to live apart from others. Whenever people came near, they had to shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” to warn them. But when they saw Jesus, the Son of God, they broke through those social boundaries and cried out with all their might: “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

At that time, Jewish society was deeply divided. Galileans were poor and often looked down upon by the more powerful Pharisees in Jerusalem. Samaritans were even worse off—they were considered impure because their ancestors had intermarried with foreigners. Yet all those divisions meant nothing when it came to leprosy.

When pain and suffering unite people, barriers disappear. The ten lepers—Jews and Samaritans together—lifted their voices as one. In that moment, they didn’t care about who was pure or impure, rich or poor. Facing death, they became one and shouted together, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

Their cry was the last act of human dignity they could offer—a shout that broke years of silence and rejection. It was the trembling reach of a hand toward the light. In those days, physical illness often led to social isolation and deep emotional wounds. But their cry met the compassion of Christ.

Jesus looked at them and said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” That must have been confusing. They had heard that Jesus could heal with just a word or a touch—yet this time, nothing seemed to happen immediately. Some may have doubted. Some may have felt disappointed. But the mercy of Christ always fulfills its promise. All that was required of them was a simple, trusting faith—a faith that *looked toward* Jesus and *cried out* to Him.

As they obeyed and started walking toward the priests, something miraculous happened—their bodies began to heal. The sores disappeared. Their strength returned. Their physical healing reflected the restoration of their relationship with God through faith.

But healing from leprosy didn't automatically restore their lives. Lepers had been branded as unclean and rejected for so long that they needed the priests' official declaration to rejoin society. So most of them ran ahead, eager to get that approval and return to their homes, their families, their normal lives.

Yet, in their rush to be restored to society, they forgot the One who had restored them to life. They had been united in suffering, but now, after healing, divisions reappeared. The Jews among them had priests to go to, but the Samaritan did not. Even healed, he remained an outsider—rejected by Jews for being Samaritan, and perhaps viewed suspiciously even among his own people.

He was healed, yet still had nowhere to belong. But that “nowhere” became the very place where he discovered who God truly is. Instead of returning to a community that would not welcome him, he returned to Jesus. Because for him, Jesus was the only home he had.

He fell at Jesus' feet, praising God and giving thanks. And Jesus said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” This was more than a declaration of physical healing—it was a second miracle. The other nine had been cleansed and returned to their old systems and lives. They received healing, but not salvation. They took off the clothes of leprosy, but not the clothes of sin.

The Samaritan, however, had lost everything—and in losing everything, he found the One thing that mattered. He realized that Jesus Himself was the true High Priest—the One who receives the rejected, the One who gives us an eternal home.

Friends, what about us? Are we like the nine who were healed but forgot to return? Are we too busy returning to the routines of this world—back to its systems, its rewards, its distractions—forgetting the source of grace itself?

The Samaritan knelt down before Jesus with his whole being. To him, Jesus was not only a healer but the Savior—the home his soul had always longed for.

Even when we feel like we don't belong anywhere, even when life makes us feel like outsiders, that may be the very moment when we are closest to grace. Because when we realize that Jesus is the only One we can truly lean on, we discover the truest kind of gratitude—the gratitude that leads to salvation.

So today, may we turn back—like the Samaritan—to fall at the feet of Jesus in thanksgiving and praise. And as we do, may we hear Him say to us as well: “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”