

# Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## “HEALING, HEALTH AND SALVATION”

Luke 17:11-19

Pentecost 19 (Proper 23)

By Steven E. Albertin

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14 When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? 19 Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

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## Diagnosis: Healed But Still Sick

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – “Bad Health”

We live in a world afflicted with all kinds of leprosy. But this world has no time for lepers. Everyone wants to be young, thin and rich. Health is worshiped and glorified. Compassion for the sick is available as long as they can pay for it. As a result there are far too many victims who are ostracized, shamed and

shunned-forced to live their lives at a distance from those who either have been smart enough or lucky enough to stay healthy. Like so many in this world, the lepers cry for mercy hoping and longing for someone to heed their cries and restore them to health, to make their bodies once again whole.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – “Bad Manners”**

Not all the cries for relief go unheeded. Luke reports that one day ten lepers were actually healed. Even though they were healed while on their way to show themselves to the priests, Jesus clearly was the one responsible for their new health. But all they could see was their restored flesh and nothing more. What did they think had happened? Were they just lucky? Were they just in the right place at the right time? Or perhaps they had done something to deserve this reversal of fortune? Whatever the case, they couldn't see beyond their own immediate gratification. They had no sense of gratitude. Hardened and self-absorbed, they were now afflicted with notoriously bad manners. They all went merrily on their way (except for one; more on him later), not giving the slightest thought to thanking the one who had been clearly responsible for their reversal of fortune. Their bad manners were simply a reflection of their bad faith (or shall we say “no faith”) in the good will of Jesus.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – “Bad Company”**

The lepers' bad manners also led them to keep bad company. All but one of them doesn't return to the company of Jesus. Even though the text doesn't say for sure, in all probability in order to return to society and receive the approval they longed for, they seek the company of the priests and the approval their Law provides. Such legal verification may temporarily provide them the approval they seek, but ultimately they could not have chosen worse company. Turning away from Jesus and instead seeking the approval of the priests is ultimately and eternally deadly. They will miss out on the blessing that Jesus grants

only to the one leper who returned to him in faith. Rejection of Jesus is finally rejection of God. And such rejection of God will never go unpunished. The nine lepers may be healed for now. But one day they will get sick with something else. And this time it will kill them. And God will not be there to bail them out.

## **Prognosis: Healed, Healthy and Saved**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – “Good Company”**

When the one leper chooses to return to Jesus, he chooses not only good company, but the best company of all, the company of God. But being in the company of God may not be such a good idea for those who lack the approval of the priests and their law; this is God “in Christ” and this God is different. This is the God who dares to be gracious and merciful even to lepers and outcasts. As the story of Luke’s Gospel unfolds, we will see that Jesus not only suffers on the cross for daring to approve of those who do not have the approval of the priests and their law, but he is also raised from the dead and thereby by divine right has the authority to overturn God’s own judgment and heal those who do not deserve it.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – “Good Manners”**

At least one leper has the good manners to return and give thanks to Jesus for the good Jesus has done. He recognizes the giver behind the gift. But even more than such good manners, such recognition is faith in God. The one leper recognizes that when he returns to Jesus, he is returning to more than just another man. He is returning to praise God. Such faith does not go unrecognized. Jesus recognizes that this leper has received something the other nine did not. He has received faith. Such faith will not be in vain. Such faith has “made him well.” That the Greek verb “sozo” is used here, is important. It indicates that not only has this leper’s poor health been healed but also

that his relationship with God has been restored. In other words, he has been “saved.” In other words, healing has led to health and finally to salvation and restoration of one’s relationship to God, the creator of the universe. And what makes this response by the one leper even more stunning and surprising is that he is a Samaritan, an outcast, a loser, the one least likely to return to worship God in the form of the Jewish carpenter.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – “Good Health”**

Formerly this one leper was isolated, ashamed, separated from others. Hurt and diseased, all he could do was worry about himself. But now there is no more any shame. Now he has been freed from his own self-preoccupation. Now he can be strong and confident. Jesus sends him on his way. To do what? To also do his best to do what Jesus did, to heal the world, to care for its sick and broken and finally to tell the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ to others. Through such mending of our world’s relationship to God can there be not only healing and health, not only keeping good company and practicing good manners, but also ultimately the reception of salvation, i.e., faith in the love of God and the desire to give God thanks.