

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

DARING TO GET CLOSE

Luke 17:11-19

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

11On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

DIAGNOSIS: Keeping Our Distance

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Crying Out*

The need was obvious. Ten lepers heard that Jesus was coming, so they went in a pack to meet him. Sickness, times ten. Isolation, times ten. A cry for mercy, times ten. Jesus could not only see their illness. He could hear it as well. Our needs may not be as obvious. Our cries for mercy not as loud. But we, too, are

living with illness, or conflict, or debt, or depression, or other problems. If we listen closely, we can hear the cry-“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” (v. 13)-forming on our lips as well.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Uncommitted*

Like the lepers, even while asking Jesus for help, we are “keeping our distance” (v. 12) from him. We call out to him but we don’t dare to get too close. The lepers had physical and social reasons for not getting closer to Jesus. For us, leaving that space between Jesus and us allows us to keep our options open. Sure, in a time of desperate need, he’s our “Master.” He the one we call on first. But do our hearts really trust that he can heal us? That he’s the only one who can heal us? In our time, with endless spiritual choices available, it might not hurt to look into a few other masters, just in case.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Alone*

When we keep our distance from Jesus and seek after other masters for healing, we will find ourselves with a more dire problem than physical illness or whatever it is that ails us. Those fake masters will turn to dust when we are faced with God’s judgment. We will be left alone, master-less, with our sin exposed. Death will not be one option among many at that point. It will be inevitable.

PROGNOSIS: God Comes Close

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Healed*

As this story opens, Jesus is “now on his way to Jerusalem” (v. 11, NIV). He is on his way to the cross (see 9:51). There, he will take on the world’s sickness and sin and give health and salvation in return. The true Master, Jesus, has other plans for those who try to keep their distance from him. In the cross, he draws near to them. He seeks out those on the edges of faith, just as he “traveled along the border between Samaria and

Galilee" (v. 11, NIV). The saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection reaches into the farthest corners of the earth. It makes sinners clean (v. 14). By dying, Jesus gives life to all.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Committed*

The healed Samaritan, the foreigner, demonstrates how a healed heart knows and loves its Lord. The Samaritan was the only one of the ten who "turned back, praising God with a loud voice" (v. 15). He was the only one who threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him (v. 16). One no longer needs to search for other masters when one trusts in the crucified and risen Jesus. Faith in the true Master is all one needs to return to God and rest in his grace and love.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Sent*

The Samaritan drew close to Jesus to give thanks, and then Jesus sent him out. Jesus tells him, "Get up and go on your way" (v. 19). Now that the leper is healed, now that he knows his Master, his options truly are wide open. He can get up, go on his way, and serve others who are ill. He can get up, go down the road, and proclaim to others the good news of what God has done for him, so that "they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:10, the epistle text for the day). He can rise up, go, and welcome those who are standing at a distance. He can dare to bring them close to Jesus, and Jesus will make them well.