

*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."*

I do not think he meant to scare us. I think he wanted to save us. But mostly he scared me.

I was very young – four or five or six I would guess – Uncle Alfred trapped my cousins and me in the parlor of my grandparents house. Let me go, I demanded.

You need to pray first.

Let me go.

Pray thanking God

Let me go.

I tried to escape the room. He blocked my way.

I mumbled some sort of prayer – he let me go.

Uncle Alfred was different. Once we went to see him in the state mental hospital in Toledo. Another time at Tiffin. Schizophrenia the doctors diagnosed his illness. When he was not locked up he seemed mostly alone – even when the house was full of family. Mostly he was quiet and when he was not he spoke of things that made no sense to me – of farming in outer space and making planets. And when he had spoken of these things he would end his words with an apology, "Excuse me for talking." He had learned that what he experienced in his own mind was not acceptable to the rest of us.

After that one time in the parlor, I never let him trap me in a room again. He made me afraid.

"Unclean, Unclean." That was the lepers cry. They were required to shout this warning to any that came near to them. "Unclean, Unclean." and those who heard this cry veered away – avoided the lepers.

But on that day the ten lepers shouted a different cry, “Jesus, master, have mercy on us.”

Jesus said to them, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” That is all he said. But those ten surely knew that the priests and the priests alone could release them from their isolation. Only after the priest declared that a leper was healed could the leper enter normal living – going into the synagogue, shopping in the market, living at home with family.

Now their going was an act of faith for they were not yet healed when they started out for the priests. But as they went, they were made clean. Trusting in Jesus’ word, obeying Jesus’ word, they were healed.

One came back praising God and laying himself face down before Jesus – thanking Jesus. And that one that came back was a Samaritan.

As I was preparing the sermon today I was thinking of who I might speak of in today’s world that would be treated the way Samaritans were treated. I thought of those who are persecuted because of their ethnic heritage or those in this country illegally because they have sneaked across the border. I thought about Muslims and the animosity some feel for them – or about those who are disdained because of their race. Jesus own people, the Jews, wanted nothing to do with Samaritans – any of the groups I mentioned above would be an apt comparison for the Samaritans. But then I thought of Uncle Alfred and the prayers we prayed at the beginning of today’s worship.

When Jesus saw the Samaritans response to being healed, Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then Jesus said to the Samaritan, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Uncle Alfred wanted me to say thanks to God - the “cursed one” trying to teach the “blessed one” to say thanks. What a reversal! Like a Samaritan returning to give thanks and the chosen ones never giving it a thought.

Some years ago when I was presiding over a number of marriages for those who were un-churched I asked them about prayer. Many told me they prayed daily.

And when I have asked those who have been in church all their lives about prayer often they tell me they seldom pray. Just like what Jesus experienced that day.

Ten were healed, made physically well, but one gave thanks to Jesus. Jesus told him that his faith made him well. One completed the circuit – the most unlikely one of all.

Uncle Alfred is a grateful man. He is eighty-five years old – on my day off I try to visit him each month at his home near Bellevue. I always take him something – he always tells me I do not need to – when I give him the jelly Sue has made, or the flowers I have grown or chocolate that he loves he thanks me and when I am leaving he always says thanks again.

He lives alone. Brilliant men and women who dedicated their lives to developing drugs to treat schizophrenia have been Jesus' healing for Uncle Alfred. He still hears voices but mostly his illness can be managed and we can have conversations that are normal.

I know that Jesus has a special place in his heart for Uncle Alfred and for all that are pushed to the side. I know that so many of you reach out to today's Samaritans out of your love for Jesus.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.