

And Then There Was One
Luke 17:11-19

Scott B. Martin October 14, 2007

My name is Moshe and it is a miracle that I am able to stand in your midst as a brother in Christ. It is only through the healing power of Jesus Christ that I can do so. I have a story to tell and I pray that it is also in some ways your story too. If it isn't, it can be.

Let me start at the beginning. As a very young man I had been considered handsome. The young girls of my village would whisper and giggle when I walked by. More than one of them pleaded with their parents to try and set up a match with me. I had a good trade too. My father taught me to be a potter, just like him. A potter will never go hungry. People always need pots.

This all changed when I came down with leprosy. No one would buy my pots. What person would buy a pot touched by a leper? I lost whatever looks I had. People would avert their eyes whenever I came near. Soon no one, not even my own family would come anywhere near me. Before long I was penniless and alone. I couldn't stand being near the town I grew up in, seeing the people I knew and loved and who knew and had loved me and yet facing rejection at every step. So I hit the road and became one of hundreds of lepers barely getting by by begging.

I wandered farther from home than I had ever been before. I left Samaria and trudged to the border region between Samaria and Galilee. Here I joined a group of lepers on the outskirts of a small town. The road was busy with pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem and sometimes these holy pilgrims and those who wanted to pretend to be holy, would toss us a few coins or leave us some food. So it was that the ten of us made our own community based on our common misery, for each of us had our own stories of loss and grief.

Remarkably, they didn't seem to care that I was a Samaritan. I don't have to tell you how much Jews look down on we Samaritans! And to tell the truth we too returned the favor, looking down on the Jews, all because we worship on Mount Gerizim and they worship in the temple in Jerusalem. As a Christian now, that all seems so foolish, but at the time it seemed important. In that little community it didn't seem to matter that I was a

Samaritan and they were Jews. When you have leprosy and everyone despises you, what difference do such distinctions make? Oh, there were times when someone in our little group might look down, what was left of their nose, at me. Even lepers like to think they are better than someone, but most of the time we were one in our common misery.

The months and years went by. You lose track when you have little to live for. We had heard of this miracle worker teacher and healer named Jesus of Nazareth. He was a Galilean and was building quite a reputation throughout the area. It was said he had healed the blind and the lame and even lepers! We dreamed of the day he would come down our dusty road. We tried to image what we would say to him, how we would plead and beg him to stop and heal us. What a glorious day that would be!

Then one day we saw this man walking down the road toward us. At first we thought it was just another pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem, but he had 12 men with him, who were following him and listening to him as they walked. As he drew closer, James, one of our number, who has particularly good hearing, heard one of the men say Jesus' name! It was him! The one we had longed to have come our way! He was here and this was our chance, maybe our only chance!

All of our rehearsed speeches went out the window. We just prayed we would scare Jesus off by our leprosy. Yes, we had heard that he had healed lepers, but was it true? Why wouldn't he be like everyone else we knew and fear us and despise us? We adopted our usual stance. We kept a safe distance between us, but O how our hearts beat within us. Could this man heal us? Please God, let it be so! I don't know who among us first shouted out: **“Jesus! Master! Have mercy on us!”**, soon we all took up the chorus, **“Jesus! Master! Have mercy on us!”**

Jesus stopped talking to the disciples and turned to us. There was such love in his eyes. Usually people don't really look at us and for good reason, but Jesus did not turn away. I felt myself touched body and soul by his gaze. His disciples too seemed to stop and hold their breaths. Would Jesus perform another miracle? They had seen Jesus perform so many miracles already, but miracles never grow old. Every miracle is unique. You can never experience too many miracles!

Then Jesus spoke to us. He didn't make any fancy speech. He didn't quote Scripture at us. He didn't preach a sermon. He didn't perform any

ritual over us. He didn't even demand that we believe in him and follow him. It was as if it was simply his nature to use his power to heal and save. And that's exactly how I've come to see Jesus. It is his nature to use his power to heal and save.

So it was that Jesus simply said to us, **“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”** We didn't need hear anything else! We knew what that meant! You see, in order to rejoin our families and friends and take up our old ways of life, a priest has to declare that we are free of leprosy. Only then can we become part of the community again.

When my companions heard Jesus' words they set off running. In my joy and ecstasy I too set off running with them. We had done everything together for so long it just seemed the right thing to do. We ran and ran and ran. I thought my lungs would burst! I thought my heart would burst with joy! Then it happened. I didn't notice it at first, but gradually the numbness of my body began to disappear. I began to feel fully alive from the inside out! The blotches on my skin from head to toe began to clear up. I could see my companions were experiencing the same thing. As we ran we shouted back and forth to one another that we were healing. The farther down the road we got the faster we were healing. Soon we were completely healed and we were running all the harder.

Then it hit me. I was a Samaritan. No priest Galilee or Jerusalem would welcome my presence. I could never be part of my former companion's community. As these thoughts were going through my mind my flat out run became a jog and my jog became a fast walk and my fast walk became a dead stop. I turned and looked behind me at Jesus. Jesus was smiling as he watched my companions run for the priest and then I felt him shift those amazing eyes to me. His smile was like sun breaking through the clouds on a stormy day.

I knew then and there I didn't need any priests blessing. I had already been blessed beyond my wildest dreams! The one who had blessed me was standing on that dusty road to Jerusalem. I found myself running back the way I had come, back to Jesus. After all, he was the one who had healed me. He was the one I should thank and so I set out running back toward Jesus.

There was no need to keep any distance from Jesus now! He had healed me! My leprosy was gone. There was no barrier between us only love and thanksgiving! By the time I got back to Jesus I was all out of breath and I stumbled the last few feet. Jesus reached out and caught me in his strong arms and steadied me. Overcome, I dropped down at his feet and began praising God in a loud voice, in between gasps for air. Over and over again I found myself saying, “Thank you Jesus,” “Thank you Jesus,” “Thank you Jesus!”

When I stopped to take a gulp of air I heard Jesus laughing, that’s right laughing! Was he laughing at me? I looked up to see Jesus lovingly looking down at me. He reached down to me and put his hand on my shoulder and continuing to laugh he looked around at his disciples and said, **“Weren’t ten men healed? Where are the other nine?”** Then he did the most extraordinary thing, he turned back to me and winked at me, that’s right winked at me and said, **“Is this Samaritan the only one who came back to thank God?”** Then Jesus said to me, **Stand up and go your way. You were healed because you believed.”**

I wasn’t really sure what Jesus meant at first and maybe I still don’t fully understand what he meant when he told me I was healed because I believed. My companions, the other nine, were also healed of their leprosy. I wasn’t the only one healed that day. Did their faith somehow heal them too? I know I didn’t think it was my faith that healed me. As far as I was concerned it was Jesus who had healed me. I still firmly believe this to this very day. But one thing I do know. I’ve been a follower of Jesus ever since that day. I’ve never stopped praising God and thanking Jesus every day of my life. In a way that I can’t fully describe this praise and thanksgiving has continued the healing that was begun that day long ago. Oh, the leprosy was healed on that day long ago. I’m not talking about my former leprosy. The sin and brokenness that we all carry, whether we are lepers or former lepers or not, is being healed day by day. Just as long ago when my leprosy was healing the further I ran down that road, my sin and brokenness is being healed the further I walk with Jesus down the road on my journey of faith. I trust that this healing will be completed when I die and join Jesus in heaven, where he has prepared a place for you and for me. Have you not found this so on your journey of faith, my brothers and sisters in Christ? Amen.

