

To be made well or whole?

On the way to Jerusalem while he was near Samaria - Jesus encounters ten lepers. They are under a sentence of death - no one will come near them - no one will touch them, their clothing or their eating utensils. By the rules of their society, rules created because of the fear of contamination, lepers were forced to live apart from everyone else, and on the occasions when they needed to come near to others for one reason or other, they rang little bells to announce their presence and to warn others to keep clear. The lepers would be very aware of the rules of their society, aware they needed to avoid contaminating anyone and aware too of the fear that others had of them. So they called out to Jesus from a distance: "Jesus, Master, Have Mercy On Us." Can you imagine how they must have felt? Scared, excited, hope? Now Jesus does respond to them but rather than saying, as he had said to others "be healed - rise up - look and see - take up your bed and walk", Jesus responds to their call by saying "go and show yourselves to the priests".

Jesus was actually referring to Leviticus, chapter fourteen, verses two and three, which specifies what a priest is to do with a leper who happens to get healed. Lepers were not allowed in the temple because they were regarded as "unclean". If cured, however, the leper could gain re-admission to the temple, and to the rest of society, as long as there was a ritual purification and a certification to say the person was "clean" by a priest. Still, Jesus' command to the ten lepers is a bit confusing. They have asked for mercy - they have asked to be healed. But Jesus simply tells them to go and act as if they are healed - to go and present themselves to the priests as if they were whole, healed, accepted, living people. Yet, despite the unusual response of Jesus - despite the possible confusion in understanding what Jesus is about, they go, and as they go - as they walk down the path towards the priests in the village they are healed.

The Greek for the word healed here - in verse 14 and again in verse 17 literally means cleansed or cured. As we know - one of the ten - a Samaritan man upon realizing he has been made clean, turns back and praising God with a loud voice he comes up to Jesus and prostrating himself, he falls on his knees and his face before Jesus and thanks him. And Jesus looks upon him - and he says something very strange - and very important to his disciples. He says: '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?' And then he says to the man: 'Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well.' The word for well that is used here can also be used to mean healed, like the word in verse 17- but unlike that word, the well here also means to be made whole or to saved.

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A basic fact of our faith is that our faith makes us whole. And in this story, we have the opportunity to see faith in a different light than we might normally see it. We have the opportunity to see faith as something that leads us to a life that is more than normal. What God has done for us is so totally amazing and we OUGHT to be constantly thanking Him and yet like the 9 lepers who did not go back to thank God, we also forget too many times to thank God. Robert Capon, in his book "Parables of Grace" urges us to think about it this way. "The ten lepers are all dead people. Whether you are talking physically, spiritually, or socially, they are dead. They would love to get healed which, in this context, means they would love to get raised from the dead, and return back home to a "normal life". That's all that they, like most people, ever really asked for, just a chance to "be like other people". They assume that this is what Jesus is all about - a return to normality, a return of the ordinary for people who, because of their infirmity and illness, are not normal and not ordinary. But one of the healed lepers, the Samaritan, receives I believe complete healing and a real resurrection. He alone comes back to say "Thanks". He realizes that his healing comes from God - through Jesus - and that God has put him in a relationship to Jesus - and that relationship alone has made him whole and alive again. All the other nine wanted out of Jesus was to be made well, to go back home and start all over again, doing what everybody else had been doing: going to school, working, attending synagogue on Friday night. And who could blame them? But one person comes back not only cured, but made whole. He comes back - whole - because he alone saw that his healing, his resurrection, for what it was. He was accepted by Jesus - by God - while he was a leper, while he was still sick, while he was untouchable, before he was made whole. He realized that Jesus didn't just want to heal people, much less make them normal, but that he wanted to, and had the power to, raise them from the dead right then. It didn't matter to Jesus that they were lepers, that they were outcasts. The Samaritan realizes how extraordinary this is, and he gives thanks to God. The power of salvation, of wholeness, is in remembering our previous state - what was normal for us - how we

were bound up by things that are not healthy or good and seeing the miracle of what we have now - of seeing that God has acted and is still acting like this today. This IS the day that the Lord has made are we rejoicing and being glad in it." Being thankful and being made whole for me are the two themes in this reading. And I do believe that God still does miraculous things today, whether physically, spiritually or socially. I wonder if this passage is a reminder to the people back then as now that God is a God who wants us whole, in every aspect of our lives.

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Today it is the baptism of Hannah and part of the baptism service asks that God will deliver her (and us) from the powers of darkness, restore us in the image of his glory, and lead us in the light and obedience of Christ. A bit later on the words are thanking God 'for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Our faith is about recognising that God through Christ heals us, and raises not only that which was dead to new life, but transforms that which was ordinary into the extraordinary and then owning that faith for ourselves. One day Jesus healed ten lepers. But only one of them, a Samaritan - an enemy to the Jews, turned and gave Jesus thanks - and he was made completely whole.

We are giving thanks today for Hannah, and for the Love that God has for her - are we also going to thank God for his complete love and healing for us? Do we want to be made well like the 9 lepers, who went back into the busyness of the world and who forgot to be thankful, OR whole like the Samaritan. To be made well or whole that is the question.