

Confessions of an Ex-Leper

Luke 17:11-19

You know, I always thought I was pretty faithful . . . kept the Sabbath, said my prayers three times a day, observed Torah . . . I kept to the rules . . . but that didn't stop me catching that blasted skin disease . . . sorry, let me take a step back . . . Hezekiah's the name . . . yes, yes, named after the king . . . but no royal blood here . . . maybe the name was dad's wishful thinking. Me? I'm just an ex-leper, that's all . . . that's my only claim to fame. Well, I guess it is a little bit of fame . . . yes, I was one of them . . . one of the ten . . . everyone knows that story . . . you know, I still ponder what that was all about.

I always tried to do the right thing . . . play by the rules . . . surely God blesses us if we do what he asks? That's why I couldn't come to terms with this skin thing . . . why me? Why was I being punished? But, even then, I did what the law requires . . . that's what faith is, isn't it? I moved out of town . . . stayed away . . . there was a bunch of us . . . a bunch of lepers . . . hanging together . . . well, no one else would! And, I get that . . . nobody wants to get close to a leper . . . they might catch something; but I could never get used to feeling like we were already dead . . . or, like some exhibit in a zoo with a sign on the cage: 'Please don't touch the animals'. That's why we called out that day . . . I mean, why not? There's no law against asking for help. Look we kept our distance . . . he wasn't in any danger . . . but some of the blokes had heard of this Jesus . . . they said he was some sort of healer . . . that he played a bit fast and loose with the rules . . . that he didn't mind hanging round with the heathen and the unclean . . . one bloke even said he touched the dead . . . at that moment he sounded like our kind of guy! So we called out, "Oi! Jesus! Over here. Have mercy on us!"

Well, he stopped . . . and walked over towards us . . . I thought he was going to come over and lay his hands on me . . . offer up a prayer to the almighty . . . work his magic . . . but, he stopped . . . and called out . . . told us to go and show ourselves to the priest. Which was strange . . . that's what you would do if you were healed . . . get the priest to have a look and give the all-clear.

But, we *weren't* all clear! He hadn't done anything . . . I could still see the rash . . . but, hey, what the heck . . . he said go, so we went . . . and, would you believe it . . . on the way . . . it went . . . from all of us! We were clean! So, we ran . . . boy, did we run! Laughing with joy . . . not quite willing to believe what had happened. But, the priest confirmed it! He said we could go home . . . back to our families. I tell you what, I gave thanks to God on that day . . . in the synagogue . . . I just had to . . . it was the right thing to do . . . it's the very least the law requires. I mean, wouldn't you? We were clean . . . we had our lives back.

Great story, hey? Except that's not how it's been reported. The story's gone 'round that we were ungrateful . . . which is a bit unfair. And, it's because of that other bloke . . . the Samaritan. He started out with us to the temple but stopped and turned around. Well, we weren't going to wait for him . . . we needed the priests' seal of approval that we were clean . . . so we could go home . . . that's what the law said . . . that's what mattered. But, he went back to thank Jesus. So, he was grateful! Good for him. So were we! So, what's with Jesus with his questions? Yes, I heard about that, too! "Weren't there ten of

you? Where's the other nine?" Well, Mr Jesus, we did what you told us. As outlandish as it seemed . . . we did it. Doesn't that take faith? To run to the priests just because you said! But, we did . . . as we were told. And, we were clean! You think we weren't happy about that? You think we weren't grateful? You think we weren't overjoyed to be able to do our duty again . . . come into the temple . . . get the all-clear from the priest . . . we did what the law required . . . and we got our life back . . . surely there's nothing better than that!

But, lately, I've been wondering about that . . . and about that Samaritan. I looked him up, you know . . . later on. I couldn't stop wondering. He told me about when he went back . . . but, more than that . . . he told me Jesus' story. He told me how he went back praising God . . . how he fell at Jesus feet and thanked him . . . and how Jesus said, "Get up, be on your way, your faith has made you well" . . . like there was something better than been made clean . . . like there was something more than living by the rules . . . like there was something else to life. Then he told me about Jesus . . . how Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem . . . he was on his way there to be crucified . . . to be killed . . . like it was his mission . . . like it was the most important thing in the world . . . and yet, he stopped and listened to our cries for help! He showed us mercy! Surely, if anyone suffered unjustly, it was Jesus? That's what the Samaritan said . . . and I'm beginning to wonder.

In the end he was nailed to a cross . . . beside two criminals . . . he died with them. No, that's not what the Samaritan said . . . he died for them . . . yes, that was it . . . he died for them . . . for both of them . . . for the one who begged him and for the one who mocked him! He didn't have to, the Samaritan said, but his sense of love and mercy drew him towards Jerusalem. That's why he went back . . . the Samaritan . . . that's why he went back, he said . . . because he didn't have to stop . . . Jesus . . . he didn't have to make us clean . . . but he did . . . and, then he allowed himself to be condemned and cast out among the unclean. But, for what? That's what I don't understand. Why would you do that?

I still say my prayers three times a day, and keep the Sabbath, and observe Torah . . . I attend synagogue . . . I do what is required . . . happily . . . life is pretty good . . . I am clean . . . and I *am* grateful . . . but, I wonder . . . I wonder sometimes, whether there is more to life than that . . . I wonder.

I still see the Samaritan occasionally. He's still around these parts. I see him mostly up there on the outskirts of town . . . sitting with the lepers . . . bringing them food . . . chatting with them . . . he seems unafraid. I wonder why he does that. After all, he doesn't have to . . . not anymore . . . he's an ex-leper now . . . like me, I guess.

Like me.

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