

真實的醫治 True Healing

Luke 17:11-19

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Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

ATPC

I have been serving as a chaplain at a cancer hospital for more than two months. When I visit patients, I often ask them what their expectations for healing are. Most of them say “to be cured” or “for the tumor to shrink.” Interestingly, their answers usually have little to do with how severe their cancer is. It makes sense if a patient’s tumor is small and found early, but there are also some who, even when told they have only a few months left, still firmly believe they will be healed. Unless such beliefs create a serious communication gap, we usually respect their expectations. If one day we ourselves are hospitalized, what would you expect for your own healing?

Today’s Scripture is about Jesus’ healing. On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus entered a village where ten people with leprosy stood at a distance and called out for mercy. Remarkably, Jesus did not touch them—or even go near them—but simply told them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they went, all ten were made clean. Yet only one of them returned to praise God, and the Bible does not tell us what happened to the other nine. To the one who returned, Jesus said, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well” (17:19).

We have often heard that this story teaches us the importance of gratitude. Because one person gave glory to God while the other nine did not, Jesus questions the nine and praises the one who returned. This interpretation certainly makes sense. Yet beyond a moral lesson about saying “thank you,” the story also invites us to explore deeper teachings about the social background of the time and what kind of relationship Jesus teaches us to have with God.

This story is clearly about more than physical healing. If it were only about that, the story could have ended at “and as they went, they were made clean” (17:14), but it continues, showing Jesus’ interaction after their bodies were healed. When we reflect on healing in faith, we realize there is much more to consider. Today, we will explore three aspects of Jesus’ healing and care.

Healing of Isolation and Loneliness

First, let us notice where these people with leprosy were located. According to Jewish law:

“The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:45–46). These people were likely not living among others in the village but together on its outskirts. When they saw Jesus, instead of shouting “Unclean! Unclean!” as the law required, they cried out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (Luke 17:13).

Their physical and geographical separation severely limited their social support. As we know, human beings are social creatures. No one can be completely isolated and remain mentally healthy. That is why Jesus said, “Go and show yourselves to the priests” (17:14). Only after being examined and declared clean by a priest could they rejoin the community and live with others again.

In our modern lives, we can observe that when a person becomes ill, many forms of support break down—sometimes family or friends, sometimes work or leisure activities that once gave life meaning. When these connections are lost, people naturally feel lonely or discouraged. Healing, therefore, is not only about the body but also about how we can restore the most basic human connections within our limits.

In hospital chaplaincy, it is fascinating to observe the interactions between patients and their support networks. Some patients bicker and complain with their caregivers, sometimes even teasing one another. Yet compared to such noisy friction, what worries me more is when care becomes cold and mechanical. When care loses warmth, it feels like a sterile operating table—necessary and functional, but emotionally chilling. In contrast, I have seen patients who, though they have no family or friends visiting them, form deep and affectionate bonds with nurses, constantly expressing gratitude and appreciation for their attentive care.

Healing of Identity and Status

Next, the Gospel deliberately notes that the one who returned to thank Jesus “was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:16). Because all ten were healed *on their way* to the priests, when the Samaritan saw that he was healed and turned back, it likely means he never went to the priests at all. In other words, he disobeyed both Jewish law and Jesus’ command.

Yet this detail reveals something profound. The very existence of Samaritans was already

considered impure according to Jewish laws, which strictly guarded their bloodlines and forbade intermarriage. But after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, the people of Samaria intermarried with foreigners under Assyrian rule, producing what Jews considered a “mixed race.” When the Jews later returned to rebuild the Second Temple, Samaritans were rejected, and they established their own temple and priesthood. From that perspective, asking a Samaritan leper to show himself to a *Jewish* priest was inherently contradictory.

In real-life healing, too, one’s social identity often shapes access to and experience of care. Two weeks ago, I visited a kind and gentle patient for the second time. To my surprise, he was shouting angrily at the nurse. On the surface, it looked like he was simply upset about poor pain management. But after spending time listening, consulting the staff and social worker, and reviewing his records, I realized he was a classic example of social marginalization: unhoused, living with HIV, and estranged from family. Eventually, I understood that his anger about medication changes was actually a struggle to defend his last bit of personal autonomy and dignity as a human being. Without awareness of his background, it would have been easy to dismiss him as irrational and troublesome. Only when we develop sensitivity to people’s social contexts can we witness deeper healing taking place.

Healing through Faith

Finally, Jesus declares to the Samaritan, “Your faith has made you well” (17:19). For Jesus, the key was not the physical cure, but the faith shown through the Samaritan’s response. Although he did not go to the temple, he fully trusted Jesus and recognized where the true presence of God resided. In the Old Testament, God gave Israel the temple as a place of communication with the divine. But in the New Testament, as Jesus foretold, he himself became the new temple—the living meeting place between humanity and God. Thus, when the Samaritan returned to Jesus, he was in fact entering the truest temple, standing before the very presence of God.

This kind of faith challenges us to ask: what actions does Jesus call forth from our faith? Some may think that constant praise, prayer, or Bible reading in a hospital room is proof of faith. But if we look at the nine others who went to the priests and never returned, we might infer that Jesus desires more than religious rituals or outward piety. True faith is giving glory to God in all

circumstances—whether the outcome appears good or bad in human eyes.

One of the things that continually surprises me in the hospital is how patients often say the most inspiring things without even realizing it. I once saw a patient preparing for chemotherapy, about to have a painful IV inserted. Her husband suddenly took a photo. I was startled and looked at him, but he smiled and explained that they wanted to use the photo later in church to share their testimony. Many times, I go in thinking I will encourage patients, but instead I leave encouraged by them. Their lives become vessels that glorify God. Such faith flows naturally; it does not need elaborate rituals to prove itself.

The Model and Calling of Healing

In conclusion, from the story of Jesus healing the ten people with leprosy, we see that his healing was never only physical but holistic. Jesus cared about their isolation and loneliness, allowing them to be restored to community life through priestly confirmation. He also cared about their social wounds, affirming the Samaritan who returned to give glory to God—even though Jewish priests would never have accepted him. And above all, Jesus cared about faith, proclaiming that this man’s faith had saved him.

We too are called to follow Jesus in this ministry of healing. When we care for others, may we have that sensitivity and compassion. Even if we have no medical training, as followers of Christ, we can still offer forms of healing that cannot be replaced. And when we fall ill one day, may we remember that while our bodies receive care from medical professionals, our hearts also need companionship, acceptance, and the grace to give glory to God through both joy and suffering.

Let us pray: *God of healing, we thank you for the miracle through which Jesus cleansed the lepers, teaching us what true healing means. We understand that when a person is sick, the wounds are not only physical—they also affect the mind, the heart, and the spirit through broken support systems and diminished dignity. Grant us tender hearts that reach out in genuine care when we are healthy, and humble hearts that receive love when we are in need. In this relationship of healing and being healed, may we experience your real and living grace every day and become your messengers of healing. Make us vessels of your compassion, that in both strength and weakness we may glorify your name. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*