

PEOPLE, POWER, AND PRAISE

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING TELLS OF THE STORY OF THE TEN LEPERS. **WHY TEN LEPERS?** ALTHOUGH THERE ARE OTHER PARABLES OF TEN – THE TEN TALENTS, THE TEN VIRGINS, AND OF COURSE THERE ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, **IT IS NOT THE NUMBER THAT IS THE STORY HERE.**

IN A PREVIOUS MESSAGE I SAID **“WE HAVE TO STUDY THE BIBLE NOT JUST READ IT”** AND THAT IS TRUE OF TODAY'S READING. WE COULD LOOK AT THIS AS ANOTHER “HEALING STORY” AND STACK IT NEXT TO THE OTHER ONES ALONG WITH THOSE STORIES OF JESUS RAISING PEOPLE FROM THE DEAD, BUT WE WOULD BE MISSING SOME VERY IMPORTANT SPIRITUAL MEANING HERE. **I WANT US TO PUT OURSELVES THERE AND WONDER WHICH ONE OF THE LEPERS WOULD WE HAVE BEEN OR WOULD WE HAVE EVEN BEEN THERE?**

WE REALIZE THAT IN THIS STORY, THE TEN LEPERS HAVE NOT BEEN HEALED BUT ARE TOLD BY JESUS TO GO AND SHOW THEMSELVES TO THE PRIESTS OF THE TEMPLE. **THE LEPERS ARE HEALED ON THEIR WAY TO THE TEMPLE, AND AS WE KNOW, ONLY ONE CAME BACK GIVING THANKS AND GLORY TO GOD FOR WHAT HE HAD DONE.** THE ONLY CONCLUSION WE CAN DRAW FROM THE REST OF THE STORY IS THAT THE OTHERS NEVER CAME BACK AND LIKELY WERE HEALED. WE CAN ASSUME THIS BECAUSE JESUS ASKS “WERE NOT TEN HEALED, BUT WHERE ARE THEY?”

NOW PUT YOURSELF BACK THERE AS ONE OF THE TEN LEPERS. CAN'T IMAGINE THAT, THEN LOOK AT IT THIS WAY – **THE LEPERS WERE LABELED AS “UNCLEAN” BY PEOPLE OF THEIR TIME. AREN'T WE “UNCLEAN TOO BECAUSE OF SIN?** DON'T WE JUST LIKE THE PEOPLE OF JESUS' TIME PLACE PEOPLE ON THE FRINGE OF SOCIETY BECAUSE IN OUR EYES THEY ARE UNCLEAN OR MAYBE BETTER SAID THEY HAVE SOMETHING WE DON'T LIKE. THEY ARE NOT LIKE US!

I HAVE BROUGHT UP A FEW TIMES NOW THE FACT THAT **OUR CHURCH IS A FAMILY. DO WE AT TIMES TREAT OR SHOULD I SAY MISTREAT OTHERS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT IN OUR FAMILY WHETHER IT BE A SMALL GROUP, A BIBLE STUDY, A YOUTH GROUP, OR ANY ORGANIZATION INSIDE THE CHURCH?** IS THIS NOT THE PLACE THAT WE SHOULD BE REACHING OUT TO ANYONE WHO WALKS THROUGH OUR DOORS?

I WILL SAY IT AGAIN – **THERE IS A WORLD OF HURT OUT THERE AND MUCH CHANGE, BUT FOR US AS DISCIPLES IT IS NOT A MATTER OF CHOICE WHETHER WE REACH OUT.** MAYBE ONE OF OUR FIRST OBJECTIONS IS *“I AM JUST NOT GOOD AT THAT”!* NO, YOU MAY NOT BE **BUT “WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE”** AND HE WILL HELP US ALL WHEN WE REACH OUT TO ONE OF HIS CHILDREN AND AS FAR AS I KNOW WE ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN.

A FEW WEEKS AGO I WENT TO SOMEONE WHO HAD BEEN VISITING THE CHURCH, AND REMEMBER SOMETHING I OVERHEARD THEM TALKING ABOUT, WELL THAT OPENED A WHOLE CONVERSATION WHEN I BROUGHT THE SUBJECT UP. IT IS THAT SIMPLE. **REMEMBER JESUS HAD QUITE A CREW OF TWELVE – WORKING-CLASS, UNEDUCATED, POOR SPEAKERS AND LOOK WHAT THEY DID TO THE WORLD AND THE PEOPLE THEY REACHED OUT TOO!!!!**

OKAY, SO WHAT HAS THAT GOT TO DO WITH TEN LEPERS AND ME TODAY? I BELIEVE HUMAN NATURE IS HUMAN NATURE. **WE HAVE MUCH MORE IN COMMON WITH THOSE THAT WENT BEFORE US THAN WE ADMIT TO.** BY LOOKING BACK AT THESE LEPERS AND UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE WE CAN BETTER DEAL WITH ITS SHORTCOMINGS WHEN THEY DO CONFRONT US IN SITUATIONS WE FACE ALL THE TIME. **MAYBE WE WOULD ALL LIKE TO THINK WE WOULD BE THAT ONE LEPER THAT CAME BACK AND SHOWED HIS THANKS, HIS GRATITUDE AND GLORIFIED GOD, BUT** MAYBE WE CAN WITH HONESTY SEE A PART OF OURSELVES IN THE OTHER NINE LEPERS. REMEMBER ROMANS 12:3 *“Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.”* THAT TO ME IS A GOOD DEFINITION OF HUMILITY, HERE IS ANOTHER - **Humility is not Thinking Less of Yourself, But Thinking of Yourself Less”.**

LET'S LOOK AT POSSIBLE REASONS WHY THE OTHER NINE NEVER RETURNED AND HOW THOSE REASONS COULD SPEAK TO US ABOUT HUMAN NATURE, OUR HUMAN NATURE, SO WE CAN BETTER REACT TO IT IN OTHERS AND OURSELVES.

ONE VERY POSITIVE TRAIT OF HUMAN NATURE IS THE FACT THAT IN THE CASE OF THE TEN LEPERS DESPERATELY SEEKING JESUS FOR A CURE THEY FORGOT THEIR DIFFERENCES AND WENT AS A GROUP. AFTER ALL WE KNOW FOR SURE AT LEAST ONE WAS A SAMARITAN, WHICH GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE JEWS HAD ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH. THE SHOCK OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL WHEN JESUS, A JEW, SPOKE TO HER. I SAID EARLIER **WE TEND TO STICK WITH PEOPLE WE KNOW AND ARE COMFORTABLE WITH,** BUT A COMMON PROBLEM OR DIFFICULTY CAN INDEED BREAK DOWN THOSE BARRIERS AND LET US BREAK OUT AS IT DID IN THE CASE OF THE LEPERS.

ONE OF THE REASONS A LEPER DID NOT RETURN COULD HAVE BEEN TO SEE IF THE CURE WAS REAL. **DON'T WE ALL AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER THINK TO OURSELVES OR OUT LOUD “PROVE IT”?** ISN'T IT ODD THAT THESE MEN CAME TO JESUS IN THE FIRST PLACE HOPING TO BE CURED AND THEN DOUBTING IT WHEN IT DID HAPPEN?

I BELIEVE ONE OF THE **TOUGHEST HURDLES** TO OVERCOME IS WHEN IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY **WE DO,** WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE GRACE OF GOD, **CHANGE AND PEOPLE WON'T BELIEVE IT!!!** THEY ARE *“WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP”* AS WE LIKE TO SAY. *IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO DOUBT AND GOD GAVE US DOUBT FOR OUR OWN GOOD, A SAFETY NET IF YOU WILL.* IT WOULD HAVE BEEN GOOD IF THE JONESTOWN PEOPLE WOULD HAVE HAD SOME DOUBT ABOUT THEIR LEADER.

ANOTHER PHRASE WE USE REMINDS US OF OUR HUMAN NATURE – “*I WILL BELIEVE WHEN I SEE WITH MY OWN EYES*” ONE OF THE MOST WELL KNOWN PEOPLE TO USE THOSE WORDS WAS THOMAS, A DISCIPLE OF JESUS!

ANOTHER REASON FOR NOT COMING BACK THAT GOES ALONG CLOSELY WITH THE FIRST IS **THE LEPER MIGHT HAVE WANTED TO SEE IF HIS CURE WAS GOING TO LAST**. *WE IN OUR HUMANNESS DO IT ALL THE TIME*. SOME ODD COUPLE GETS MARRIED AND WE SAY “NEVER GOING TO LAST”. WE ARE TOLD TIME AFTER TIME OF GUARANTEES ON PRODUCTS, BUT PARTIALLY DUE TO EXPERIENCE WE HAVE A DOUBT THAT THE PRODUCT WILL PERFORM AS ADVERTISED. THAT DOUBT CARRIES OVER MANY TIMES IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY, NOT MEANING WE DON'T HAVE FAITH, BUT AS MANY TIMES AS GOD HAS “COME THROUGH” FOR US WE STILL DOUBT AND WONDER IF SOMETIME HE WILL DO IT AGAIN.

MAYBE ONE OF THE LEPERS WENT AWAY SAYING “*SEE YOU LATER JESUS*”. HAVE WE TOLD SOMEONE SEE YOU LATER OR I'LL BE THERE AND NEVER SHOW? GOOD OLD HUMAN NATURE, SOMETIMES SAYING ANYTHING TO GET SOMEONE OFF OUR BACK? MAYBE THE LEPER WAS HIDING THE REAL REASON FOR NOT COMING BACK, HE JUST DIDN'T BELIEVE ANYTHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN AND ONCE IT DID HE DID NOT WANT TO GO BACK AND ADMIT IT. GUESS NO ONE HERE EVER HAD THAT PROBLEM, RIGHT?

WHAT IS AMAZING ABOUT GOD AND HIS GRACE WHEN WE DO DECIDE TO COME BACK AND ADMIT WE WERE NOT QUITE RIGHT, OKAY WE WERE WRONG HE NEVER TELLS US “I TOLD YOU SO” HE JUST OPENS HIS LOVING ARMS AND HUGS US WITH GRACE AND FORGIVENESS.

THEN THERE IS THE ‘DENIER’ WHO STATES “I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN WELL ANYWAY”. NOT WANTING TO GIVE GOD CREDIT FOR HELPING US, BLESSING US, AND BEING THERE WHEN WE CALL OUT TO HIM. **WHEN THE PROBLEM PASSES, WE JUST PLAIN FORGET TO GIVE HIM ANY CREDIT OR GRATITUDE FOR BRINGING US THROUGH**. NO MATTER HOW LARGE OR HOW SMALL, *GOD APPRECIATES OUR THANKS AND PRAISE*. THE PSALMIST IN PSALM 118 ENCOURAGES US TO “*GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD*” AND NAMES AT LEAST THREE TIMES IN THE PSALM TIMES WE CALL UPON GOD AND HE NEVER FAILS TO ANSWER. HE NEVER FORGETS AND NEITHER SHOULD WE AS WE TELL OUR CHILDREN “A SIMPLE THANK YOU WILL BE SUFFICIENT”

MIGHT ONE OF LEPERS THOUGHT “*THIS JESUS REALLY DIDN'T DO MUCH*” HE JUST TOLD ME TO GO TO PRIESTS. IN OUR HUMANNESS THERE IS THAT TENDENCY “*OUT SIGHT OUT OF MIND*”. HE HAS ALREADY FORGOTTEN IT WAS HE WHO HAD SOUGHT JESUS AND NOW HIS MIND HAS REASONED THAT JESUS DIDN'T HAVE MUCH IF ANY PART IN HIS HEALING. DO WE WANT TO TAKE THE CREDIT FOR SOMETHING AFTER IT GOES WELL WHEN THE CREDIT AND GLORY SHOULD BE GOING TO GOD? WE WERE THE ONES THAT PRAYED, GOD JUST LISTENED TO US!

COULD IT BE THAT WHEN WE DO HAVE A PROBLEM THAT ONCE IT IS SOLVED WE PUFF UP AND SAY THERE NEVER WAS A PROBLEM IN THE FIRST PLACE? WE DON'T ADMIT GOD EVER HELPED? LATER IN THE STORY JESUS IS PUZZLED TO WHERE THE OTHERS WERE AND THAT ONLY ONE RETURNED, A SAMARITAN!

THEN THERE IS POSSIBLY ONE MORE REASON A LEPER DIDN'T RETURN – *ANY RABBI COULD HAVE DONE IT*, JUST HAPPENED TO BE JESUS. MANY OF US HAVE EXPERIENCED A SPECIAL PERSON AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME THAT CAME AND WENT IN OUR LIVES. MAYBE AN ANGEL, MAYBE SOMEONE GOD HAS GIVEN A WORD AND THEY BRING IT TO US. **IT WAS A “GOD THING”, CERTAINLY NOT COINCIDENCE. GOD IS NOT SOMEONE UP THERE LOOKING THE OTHER WAY. NO, HE WATCHES OVER US DAY AND NIGHT AFTER ALL WE ARE HIS CHILDREN!**

NUMEROUS PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE TELL US **“TO SEEK GOD”** - FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT THROUGH THE END OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. **HIS DESIRE IS TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH US, A LOVING RELATIONSHIP.**

ONE ELEMENT OF THAT RELATIONSHIP IS BROUGHT HOME IN TODAY'S STORY OF THE TEN LEPERS AND THAT IS **GRATITUDE, THE GIVING OF THANKS TO GOD FOR WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE IN OUR LIVES.** HOWEVER, GOD WANTS US TO NOT ONLY BE THANKFUL TO HIM, BUT FOR AND TO THE PEOPLE HE HAS PUT ON OUR SPIRITUAL PATH AND IN OUR LIVES. PAUL SUMS IT UP QUITE CLEARLY IN I THESSALONIANS 5:18 *“in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

AMEN.