

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 13, 2019

“The Grateful Samaritan.”

Luke 17:11-19

Everyone knows about the Good Samaritan. He is one of the best-known characters in history. We know he belonged to a despised people—Samaritans—people who did not keep the laws in the prescribed way and who had intermarried with foreigners. We know he was the surprise hero in Jesus’ parable that bears his name. We know he was a generous and compassionate man who paid an innkeeper out of his pocket for the upkeep of a stranger who had been stripped, robbed, beaten, and left for dead beside the road to Jericho.

Everybody knows about the Good Samaritan. But let’s not forget the story of the Grateful Samaritan. This Samaritan was a member of a group of ten lepers who asked Jesus for mercy.

Have you ever asked Jesus for mercy? Have you ever gotten on your knees and prayed for the Lord to have mercy on you? Have you ever knelt in darkness and lifted your voice to heaven in a desperate plea because there was nowhere else to turn? Then you can relate to these poor lepers.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and he stopped at a village. We don’t know its name. Just a village. But on the outskirts were these ten lepers standing off to the side. They didn’t even approach Jesus. They knew they dare not. Leprosy was such a dreaded disease that those who were inflicted with it were not even allowed to come close to those who were well. Let’s be sure that these lepers had families in town. Here was someone’s father, someone’s brother, someone’s daughter. But they would never again embrace their loved ones. Never again would they have fellowship with those free from this disease. All they can do is cry out from a distance, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

There are people today who call on Jesus from afar. The best-known prayer today is no longer the Lord’s Prayer, it is the Serenity Prayer. ‘God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference.’

Why is the Serenity Prayer so well known? It is the prayer used by 12-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous. The number of people who suffer from chemical addictions in this land is staggering. Some are able to keep their addictions secret. They’re still able to go to work each day. Still able to work-out at the health club. Sometimes even dress up for church. But there are many others who, like those 10 lepers on the outskirts of that village, are stumbling along the streets of our cities, huddling in doorways when the weather is bad, sleeping on cots at the Salvation Army or the Rescue Mission. Some of them are crying out from prison cells. But the cry is always the same. They are calling out from afar. “Lord, have mercy on me.”

And don’t kid yourself. This is no longer just a problem of the Inner City.

In fact, a study completed by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse some years ago, revealed that in any given month eight-graders in small-town America were twice as likely to have used amphetamines—83% more likely to have used crack—50% more likely to have used cocaine—34% more likely to have smoked marijuana—29% more likely to have drunk alcohol—70 % more likely to have been intoxicated than their peers in large metropolitan areas.

This is a universal problem. And here is the scary part: many of these people who are afflicted with chemical addictions sooner or later face this dilemma: give up your addiction or die. And some of them are into their habit so deep that they choose death.

When you see people literally throw away everything worth having in order to feed their habit, you know you are up against something that is demonic.

You and I cannot appreciate the power of these addictions over people’s lives.

Sure, we can say self-righteously, “Well, if they didn’t take that first drink or inhale that first joint of marijuana they wouldn’t be in this condition.” That’s true, but it is also irrelevant. It makes no difference to God. Here is what matters to God: Every one of these addicts is someone’s son, someone’s daughter, someone’s Daddy, even someone’s Mommy. Somewhere there is someone praying for these people stumbling in our streets even if they are too far gone to pray for themselves. Even more important, each of these people is a child of God.

There are people crying to Jesus from afar today just as these 10 lepers called to him from afar. And what did Jesus do when these 10 lepers called to him? You know what he did. He heard their prayer and healed them. That’s who Jesus is. You and I may be able to close our hearts to the drunk or the addict, but Jesus couldn’t. Maybe that ought to say something to us.

Jesus looked on these ten lepers and saw them as human beings in need and responded with love. Jesus said to them, “Go, show yourselves unto the priests.” Before a leper who had been healed could be readmitted to his village, he must first pass inspection by a priest. And so, Jesus sends them to the priests.

And on the way, each of the ten was healed.

But one of the ten, says Luke, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and he fell down on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. This man, says Luke, was a Samaritan.

Seeing this, Jesus said, "Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"

We know, don't we? They were off celebrating, reuniting with family and friends. They were too preoccupied living out their good fortune to think about their healer. That's life. That's reality. Every one of us in this room has been blessed beyond measure, but do we all live grateful lives?

The grateful Samaritan. I imagine that from this day on he lived his life in gratitude to Jesus.

Are you calling out to Jesus from afar this morning? "Lord, have mercy on me?" Are you one of those who has already experienced Christ's mercy? Are you, then, like the grateful Samaritan? Does your life bear witness to your gratitude?