

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
9th October 2022 - 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: 2 Kings 5:14-17. Psalm: 97:1-4. 2nd: 2 Timothy 2:8-13. **Gospel:** Luke 17:11-19.

The recent pandemic, with the lockdowns and social distancing, masks etc. certainly has many similarities with leprosy without trying to diminish the seriousness of leprosy throughout the ages. Keeping apart, little or no social contact, isolation, brought some of the same hopelessness that characterises the lepers in the readings today. It could be said that for them they were people for whom all hope had died.

As lepers, both Naaman and the ten in the gospel faced a bleak life: an incurable disease, physical pain, loss of limbs, reduced to begging and living in wild and desolate places away from contact with the rest of human society. Leper squints were often in mediaeval parish churches in this country. The squints were for the lepers to see the altar and elevation from outside, as they couldn't go in.

In his desperation, Naaman made the journey from Syria to find the prophet Elisha, and so encountered the healing power of the one true God. The gospel scene is also set within a journey. Jesus is travelling along the border between Galilee and Samaria. Borders are interesting places, because it is there that cultures collide. They can tend to be places of friction and danger. We need only to think of the wars over the centuries, not to mention Ukraine/ Russia right now; and the migrants crossing both the Mediterranean; the English Channel, the Mexican border, many others, all as relevant today as in biblical times.

Jesus always reached out to people who were on the borders or margins of society in various ways: sinners: those who were poor or sick; women; foreigners. It is these people who seem to be most open to the message of hope that he brings. The point is reinforced in the gospel in that only the foreigner, the Samaritan is the one who comes back to give thanks for his cure – just as Naaman took back home with him some of the soil of Israel so that he could always worship the God of Israel and offer thanks to the Lord.

That attitude of thanksgiving from these two men is a sign of a deeper healing: they had been touched by God in a profound way; they were made whole in a way that was not just skin-deep. Their faith had saved them. Their hopelessness was turned into thanksgiving.

Since the pandemic there is no doubt life has changed for everyone all around the world. We do talk of global turmoil. Everywhere affected. We may not be lepers, but each of us now carries our own personal wounds and need of healing. In that sense, most of us live in the borderlands. It may be we are in need of physical healing, or we might carry with us wounds of the memory.

We may struggle with mental health issues, or we may carry the burden of looking after a sick person, or living in a loveless marriage, or working at a dead-end job, or having no job or money at all. These are experiences of living at the edges of life, of being marginalised, of living with a kind of leprosy. It can seem there is no hope.

But often it is through the experience of hardship and real struggle that God can reach out and touch our lives.

Our woundedness can actually connect us with God.

The lepers cried out to Jesus. 'Have pity on us' Kyrie eleison. Lord have mercy.

Today's readings challenge us to live our lives in hope not despair. Despite being imprisoned and awaiting execution St Paul in the 2nd reading clung to his hope. He wrote; 'they cannot chain up God's News.' Perhaps only we can do that.

Like the lepers, we can allow God to meet us in the borderlands of our lives, touch our woundedness, restore our hope.

That is the faith that saves. That is the hope that makes us whole.