

What a lovely coincidence that today's reading from the Old Testament and the Gospel features the healing of lepers! If you've had the opportunity to read the book +John Rabb recommended about St. Francis, you know that the lepers of Jesus time, like the lepers of St. Francis's time, were separated from the community. For the Jews and Samaritans of Jesus day, they were considered ritually "unclean" and could not participate in the life of their community. Of necessity, they had to subsist on charity.

Similarly, in Francis's time "lepers were the most ostracized in medieval society."<sup>1</sup> Francis worked and served with lepers for the simple reason that Our Lord did; further, in serving lepers Francis was able to imitate our Lord and live out the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> So let's look at our passage and see if we can glean from it how WE might also imitate Jesus and how we might respond in our encounter with Jesus.

Our passage opens in a border region, between Galilee and Samaria. It is an area where Jews do not predominate. Luke is reminding us that Jesus is moving beyond his hometown and is going toward Jerusalem, moving toward the confrontation between God's way and the unjust power of both secular and religious authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, Lawrence S., *Francis of Assisi Performing the Gospel Life*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI) 2004. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 12.

In this border region, news of Jesus' healing work must have preceded him because the outcasts of society notice Jesus and call out to him. As required of them, they remain apart from those following Jesus, they do not draw near, they just call out. And Jesus *sees* them. He orders them to go and present themselves to the priests. All 10 do as Jesus directs, but apparently only one notices that on the way to the priests, he has been healed. He is no longer suffering from a skin disease, he is no longer ritually unclean, he no longer has a compelling reason to be kept apart from his family, his friends, his community. He is fully restored to his former self, he has been healed.

And in irony of ironies, the one who notices is the foreigner, the stranger, the enemy of Jews, a Samaritan. Like Naaman in our Old Testament reading, the one in receipt of God's mercy is not one of the chosen people. And it is **THIS** one who returns and give thanks to Jesus and praise to God. We don't know the religious identity of the other nine, however, given Jesus response, we can infer that the other nine were Jews. And Jesus tells this one who has prostrated himself before Him to get up and go, his faith has made home well.

In Luke, the phrase "get up and go" portends good things are about to happen. Consider: Mary gets up and goes to Elizabeth and the prodigal son "gets up and goes" to be reunited with his father. To get up and go is to expect the promise of

good things.<sup>3</sup> In our passage this morning, the good news in Christ for us is that God is empowering us to step across boundaries or borders so that we might share God's mercies with strangers or outsiders. We are being invited to pay attention to those things worthy of praise and to give our thanks.

I notice that in the encounter between Jesus and the thankful leper, there are some strong verbs at play, verbs that we might use the rest of this Pilgrimage as part of a spiritual discipline. The verbs are "see," "return," "praise," "worship," "give thanks" and "get up and go!" I'm suggesting that each of us take just one verb or the short phrase "get up and go" but certainly not all of them, and explore that verb or phrase in the context of this trip, then in our lives as we seek our own encounters with Jesus in this next week.

As we are learning about Francis, I notice that his life and example are truly a journey. Francis's faith ebbed and flowed. I heard John say that in Francis's poem, when Francis referred to the cave, it was a metaphor for times of despair - times that resolved in favor of hope. We would be unusual people if we did NOT experience these ebbs and flows in our own faith. So as we take this Pilgrimage, this journey toward Jesus, what does Jesus see in us? What needs to be healed in us? What do

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<sup>3</sup> Audrey West, *Proper 23 Gospel passage*, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

we need to see? How are eyes being opened? What must we notice to emulate our Lord?

To whom or to what do we need to return? What overlooked event needs revisiting? What anniversary needs to be celebrated? When have we been the stranger or the ostracized one? Have we felt God's love reaching out to us? Do we see someone to whom we can extend that love? What are we grateful for? Are we offering thanks? What is happening on this trip, in our lives that we must take the time to praise God? Are we taking the time to worship each day?

St. Francis gave his whole being to emulate Christ and live the Gospel. How are we being called to live into our Christian journey? What is our encounter with Christ like? How do we want our encounter with Christ to be? As we approach the Eucharistic table this day, offer to Christ with your whole being your verb, your action for your pilgrim journey.

AMEN.