

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

readings: [2 Kings 5.1-3, 7-15c](#), [2 Timothy 2.8-15](#), [Luke 17.11-19](#)

9 October 2022

Today's reading are close to my heart as The Leprosy Mission is a Christian charitable missional organisation I have supported since adolescence.

Leprosy is both preventable and treatable and the Leprosy Mission's Global Fellowship works in 28 countries today partnering with governments, churches and other organisations to achieve their vision of defeating leprosy and transforming lives by empowering people to attain healing, dignity and life in all its fullness and working to end the transmission of the disease so future generations may be born into a world free from leprosy.

People affected by leprosy are often isolated, marginalized, disfigured, and disabled. Many feel they are discriminated against by some and ignored and forgotten by most. If that is people's experience today, when we have the medical knowledge to understand and treat the disease, how much worse must life have been for those affected in biblical days.

In our first reading we encounter Naaman – the commander of the army of King Aram. A successful, skilled man with very high status but unfortunately afflicted by a skin disease which we believe to be leprosy.

An Israelite servant girl offers him hope, tells him of the prophet in her land who she is sure could treat his disease and cure him. So Namaan gathers together a veritable treasure chest – 10 talents of silver, 6000 shekels of gold and ten sets of garments- along with a letter from the king.

When Elisha meets him, he instructs him to wash in the River Jordan 7 times and Namaan is angry and indignant, 'I thought that for me....'

I wonder how often we feel like that. We have a problem, we turn to someone for help and we don't like the message we get back. Perhaps like Naaman we had hope we can buy our way out of the difficult. Or perhaps like Naaman we secretly feel the suggestion is beneath our dignity, why has this happened to me, I'm a good person, a wealthy person, a posh person, a well-educated person, a good person and so it goes on.....

How often does our pride get in the way of us accepting help. It can be difficult to admit that we have a problem and even harder to ask for help. And when help is offered we can lack the humility needed to accept it.

When Naaman has a change of heart and does as Elisha had suggested he was healed. It was as simple as that. And as a result of his healing, his eyes are opened and he begins to recognise something of who God is. The God of all the earth.

Namaan returns to Elisha and stands before him offering him a present – how hard it is to freely receive. Namaan feels indebted and doesn't like it. It is hard for him to accept help from someone else – he is used to being in control, in charge, to being strong, powerful and victorious in battle.

But I suspect he isn't the only one who struggles with that. Most of us find it hard to be vulnerable. To admit we are struggling, to acknowledge we have needs, to accept there are things we can't do ourselves and we need other people's help. And we'd rather pay for that help than receive it as a gift.

But the first lesson we learn from today's passages is that every good gift comes from God and is freely given. The first step in faith is to acknowledge our creatureliness as the theologians call it. That all of us as creatures whom God has made are dependent on the love of God, it is God who strengthens and sustains us and gives us everything we need to live.

In this season of generosity and stewardship the first and prime concept that underlies our thinking has to be the fact that God is our creator, redeemer and sustainer and we are those who freely receive from God.

And having come to this realization, our passages invite us to think about how we will respond to the generous and gracious provision of God.

Jesus encountered ten lepers and healed them one day while he was travelling between Samaria and Galilee. The men were aware of their need and cried out to him, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'. Just like Elisha he gave them a simple instruction to follow, this time to show themselves to the priests and as they did that they were healed.

On this occasion, one of the men attributes this healing to God and it leads him to praise God and to go back and thank Jesus. He prostrates himself at Jesus' feet, a sign of submission and dependency and a recognition of Jesus' power and authority. Because he does this, he receives a deeper blessing. Not only does he find physical healing, he also finds faith and Jesus acknowledges this – it is the man's faith that has made him well and Jesus commissions him to go and pick up the threads of his life once more. That individual encounter reinforces the healing experience and gives a new direction to his living.

That is the second lesson I think these passages teach us – the importance of us being open to receive what God has for us and to be thankful.

It can be difficult for us, when we have so much and are used to providing for ourselves, to remember how dependent we are on the provision of God. We can be tempted to think we are self-sufficient and independent. We can forget where the good things we enjoy come from and we can forget to be thankful. As we inhabit this season of generosity and stewardship I want to encourage us to remember to be thankful.

As an early years teacher I used to talk a lot about our magic words – please, thank you and sorry. Each of those words is a truly transformative word. Using them makes such a difference in situations, as long as we really mean them. But how often do we as adults remember to use them. We have songs that tell us messages like, 'sorry seems to be the hardest word' and we make excuses for poor manners. But Jesus encourages us to go back to basics and to cultivate within us thankfulness and to ensure our thanksgiving overflows to those around us.

And the third point I want to mention coming out of our passages today is our willingness to give of ourselves in response to all that God has given to us. If we are truly thankful, we want to give something back. God doesn't want us to 'buy' things from him. He doesn't accept payment from us. But what he does ask of us is a willingness to go and do likewise.

Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give, go in my name and because you believe, others will know that I live – go the words of the chorus to 'God forgave my sin in Jesus' name'

In his letter to Timothy, Paul outlines his own philosophy for living. 'I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus'. Paul is thankful to God for the death

and resurrection of Jesus and the faith that he has found and gift of eternal life he has received because of Jesus' sacrifice. He lives out of that thankfulness and seeks to share everything he has found and received with others so that they too might receive the same blessing and gift of eternal life.

As we remember our dependence upon God, give thanks for all God has done for us and given to us, Paul challenges us to think of how we will share those blessings we have received. And that is the other magic word early years teachers spend their days helping children to understand. 'Share'.

Our natural temptation is to hold everything to ourselves. To feel there isn't enough to go round and resources are scarce, so we need to hold on to what we've got and do everything in our power to get more. I have seen that over and over again as young children play together.

But we are called to be those who are open to receiving every good thing God has for us, trusting that he is a God of abundance and generosity who in Christ gives us everything and holds nothing back from us. And to be thankful and grateful for all God has done for us. And to share those blessings we have received with us and be willing to sacrifice ourselves and give something back to God and to others so that they too might share in the riches and inheritance of God's kingdom.

**The Revd Nicky Fenton,
Bishop's Chaplain and Residentiary Canon**