



Jesus Heals the Leper by William Brassey Hole
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In Luke 17 there was really only one who was truly healed. And from what was this man healed? From what was he saved? Was he saved from a life of an outcast, living on the ragged edge of society, shunned by those who were “clean”? Was he saved from the terrible, crushing burden of waking up each morning to view his ravaged body, a body that the germ which causes Leprosy was slowly eating away, one finger, one toe, one body-part at a time? Oh yes, this leper was saved from these horrific conditions, but he was also saved from so much more. Because in the Gospel account this morning, nine lepers were cleansed, but only one was truly cured, only one saved. You see, there’s a difference between being cleansed of something and being truly healed. Alcoholics can tell you that. Sure, you can be clean, clean for years or even decades. But no amount of AA meetings, and no matter how big your store of abstinence chips gets, AA members will tell you that there is no earthly cure for the disease. You can be clean. But you won’t be really cured by any earthly rehab program. That kind of cure, that kind of healing comes from somewhere else. That kind of cure is found in someone else, the one – the only one who can heal even death itself.

The Psalmist talks this morning about tremendous challenges that The Lord places upon his children. The Psalmist says God proves us, He purifies and refines us like silver ore heated to the boiling point in a fiery furnace. (See v. 9) He lets us wander into the snares, and experience the pitfalls of this life. From time to time, He makes us shoulder heavy burdens, makes us go through fire and water. (See vv.10-11) But did you notice why? Did you see in the Psalm the end results of all this hardship, the victory that God wants for His children?

God wants us to realize the infinite mercies of his saving deeds. The Lord wants us to truly be witnesses of His wondrous deeds of love for His people (See vv. 4-5). He wants us to be people bursting at the seams with joy. (See v.1) God longs to bring his children into a land of eternal refreshment. (See v.11) Perhaps a large part of the reason for hardships is so that you and I can come to that place of deep, deep thanksgiving. So that, just like the leper who was truly healed, we can only and forever glorify God; so that we can be not just cleansed but absolutely cured, and saved, and one with The Lord.



El Greco's Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

Jesus tells this man, the one leper who was truly healed “your faith has healed you.” I thought I’d heard this phrase before in my Bible, so I did some checking this past week. Jesus uses this phrase in Matthew, Chapter 9 when the woman with the 12 year-long hemorrhage was cured by simply touching The Lord’s robe. He says “Daughter, for your faith has healed you.” (See Mt.9:22; Mk. 5:34)

And then there is poor blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10, the blind beggar to whom Jesus restores his sight just before The Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And Jesus assures Bartimaeus that, “Your faith has healed you.” (see Mk.10:46-52)

You get the impression from these passages that these people who were healed from their misery by The Lord had been lifted from such depths of despair through the Christ’s loving act of miraculous healing, that they can do nothing else except to glorify The Lord with all their might. To be truly healed, it would seem, a person needs to come to a place where they are able to see with absolute clarity just how desperately sick they really are.

That's true for all of us, you know. Heart-felt joyous gratitude comes from a dark well of the deepest despair. Evidently, you can't have one without the other. True healing is accompanied, necessitated perhaps by a change in one's faith. It may have been Plato who first said "Necessity is the mother of invention." In the same way, we might conclude this morning that desperation is the proving ground of faith. In moments of really raw despair when there is nowhere else to turn except to The Lord, those are the moments when we find the faith in Jesus Christ, and it is that faith which does indeed make us whole.

There is a final dimension to this healing which comes most clearly to us in the Old Testament reading for this morning. In Chapter 29 of *Jeremiah*, we read that the prophet at God's direction has sent a letter to all the Jews living in the forced exile of Babylon. And these instructions from God direct God's people to "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jer.29:7) Can't you just hear the sound of collective jaw-dropping? Doubtless, when they heard this commission, the Children of Israel were amazed. "What???" they probably exclaimed. "You mean, The Lord expects us to pray for the welfare of our captors? We're supposed to intercede on behalf of the very people who have caused us such devastating pain and defeat? How can this be?"

And even more stunning is what they people of God are to pray for. The word our English Bibles use here is the word, "welfare." But the original Hebrew word used here is one of the really big words in the Hebrew language. Because God tells his people they are to pray that their enemies will have "*Shalom*." This is the great peace that we struggle for on a daily basis. *Shalom* is that place of refuge that we all seek; that freedom from even the deepest hurts and most tragic, painful memories. *Shalom* is that peace which finally fills the God-sized hole in our hearts. And God tells his chosen people that they are supposed to intercede that this incredible holy gift of Godly peace come even to their enemies. How can this be?

Ah yes, but then we begin to remember a certain conversation. Because way back near the beginning of the story, God and Abraham had this chat. And God said, "*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" (Gen. 12:1-3) You see, from start, God had planned that his children would bless everyone they encounter, and that includes even our enemies. Now, you may very well say, "But that's not fair!" But you know what? That's not your concern. That's God's business, and believe me, he has a plan that can redeem even the hardest of hearts. But God needs his servants to be about in this world doing Our Father's business so those hearts will indeed be changed.

In Flossenburg, The SS Concentration Camp where he would be executed, on Christmas Morning of 1943 Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an incredibly beautiful prayer. And in it, he says this: "Before you [Lord] I think of all my loved ones, and of my fellow prisoners, and of all those who do their hard service in this house. Lord, have mercy!" You see, this Saint of God was willing to pray even for those who held him captive, and who he almost certainly knew would murder him. But what you may not know is that so many of those guards ended up coming to him for pastoral counseling. They even risked losing their jobs and lives to have their photograph taken with this strangely calm Lutheran Pastor, so that they could remember and think about him in the years to come. That is the way God can work in the very core of the hardest human heart. But God's people have to be willing to be there doing the hard work of interceding even for those who hate us.

In John Chapter 24 when Jesus gave us his peace that passes all understanding, it was with the intention of spreading abroad that peace to the world in which we live. And this world is in such need of just that kind of peace, even though many of this world may not yet know it. You and I are sent out as witnesses of God's love, even to those who aren't willing to love us back. It is, in fact, to the sick that God sends his healing. And that, dear ones is what we are about. We must be about Our Father's business, and that business is to heal this world and prepare it for the coming of The Lord.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. JWB+ 09-28-16

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