

Be Thankful!
Sermon October 8, 2017
Matthew 14:11-17

Most people who suffer from a difficult physical or even terminal illness are searching for God's help. They are praying to God, not to maintain a relationship with the Lord, but because they feel helpless and realize that nobody can help them, or heal them but God. The illness is forcing humans to cry out to our Heavenly Father, and not their faith. They want to be healed and they want to be healthy again.

Leprosy is a very serious disease, which still exists and kills thousands in different countries. It kills the nerves. Those affected cannot feel their body parts. They cut their feet or hands and don't feel it and cannot notice it until they are bleeding.

In Jesus' time, the **lepers were isolated** to a place where they could not contact healthy people. Their relatives dropped them some food from time to time. They were absolutely excluded from their society, and **were waiting eagerly for the moment when they would die**. This stress caused them extreme much pain and distress. **They were not allowed to enter the villages**. If a leper took the courage to leave their isolated place and enter into a populated area, based on their laws, people were allowed to stone the person to death. If a stranger by mistake approached them, they were forced to warn the strangers that they are lepers.

We see 10 lepers on the road: 9 Jews and 1 Samaritan. They were totally covered, hiding their wounds. Nine Jews and one Samaritan. The Jews and Samaritan were enemies. They did not even talk to each other. But as we see, the illness, the problems, the common pain demolishes the dividing walls. They don't care anymore about the differences, only about their common pain.

How or why did they take the courage to leave their isolated place and to search for Jesus? They took the courage to leave and to search everywhere for Jesus, because previously they talked to somebody who told them with great enthusiasm and joy who Jesus was and what Jesus could do. **They were informed** by a person that Jesus is not afraid of lepers, and He had already healed two others who had the same disease. They **heard** about the healer Jesus Christ: about His power, His love and His mercy and now they are on their way to find Jesus.

Turn to your neighbor and have a short discussion about two topics:

- share your story about the person who was talking to you about Jesus and what kind of impact that had on your life
- have you had a chance lately to talk to somebody about Jesus and His love?

They had two choices: to die (slowly in that isolated place where they lived for years or by being stoned by people) or to be healed by Jesus.

These 10 lepers had faith in Jesus, because somebody was able to share Jesus' story with them in such a powerful way that it gave them hope that they might be healed as well. This is missing from us today: such powerful enthusiasm about our faith in Jesus, which can overflow from our heart and, being shared, can give hope and life to others.

Please take it very seriously, that by talking about Jesus you can save lives. In not talking about Jesus to those who are distressed, you will let them perish, because they will never hear about the best solution: JESUS CHRIST.

The first step of faith: asking for help

When these 10 lepers saw Jesus, they cried out loudly: **“Master, Rabbi, have mercy on us!”** Previously, a leper said to Jesus: “Jesus, if you want, YOU can heal me. That meant:

- I have a serious problem but I don't want to stay this way.
- You can help me.
- It is totally up to your mercy if you will help me or not.

One of my favorite hymns (translated from Hungarian) goes: *God, I humble myself deeply before You, asking You to pour out Your endless mercy and power on me. Master, I fall into the dust in front of you as I pray.*

The sad reality is that, as **we are born, we all are infected by sin.** From the very first moment, we carry in us this horrible virus called SIN. As we grow, we sin more and more often. We sin when we do know we sin, and we sin when we don't even realize that we do something bad or evil. So far, nobody has been able to find the vaccine or the medication against this virus called SIN. But Jesus Christ came into this world to help us.

The first step is to recognize it; the second step is to admit that you carry in YOUR body the SIN, and you are able to commit all kinds of evil things if you are under a bad temptation.

The main question is: **do you want to remain as you were born?** If not, then please take the courage to cry out NOW to Jesus, who is able to help you. Ask Him for mercy and He will help you. Do not wait while doing nothing. **ASK FOR HELP HERE AND NOW.**

During pastoral counselling, I met people who reached the point when they recognized that they did something wrong, and they cannot fix their own problem but they need Jesus' help. When I asked them if they want to pray here and now

asking for help, they said: “maybe later” or “maybe at home when I am alone”. Later they told me, they NEVER prayed for help. This is why they were not healed.

Dear beloved, it is not enough to have the desire to be cleansed. We all have to extend our hands, asking for help. This is the first step.

Open right now your empty hands and say to the Lord:

- Lord, I am empty without you, and very ill.
- I want to be healed.
- I ask You to forgive me, and please give me Your mercy and Your peace.
- Have pity on me.
- Have mercy on me.
- I am waiting for You,
- Cleanse me.
- Make me clean again, make me whole again.
- Forgive me for who I am, and direct me to what I shall be, so that I may delight in your will, and walk in your ways.

We HAVE to say these things loudly. Can you please repeat this with me now LOUDLY?

LORD JESUS CHRIST, HAVE MERCY ON ME

This is the first step of faith.

The second step of faith: do what Jesus is asking you to do

Jesus said to them: “go and show yourselves to the priests.” At that time, **priests** were able to diagnose this disease, and determine if a person should be excommunicated or a healed person should go back to the community.

I assume that when these people heard this order from Jesus, maybe some questions crossed their mind such as: “Why? Jesus, You are the healer, the best physician. How should we continue our journey like this?” Or they would think: “this is totally silly. We took a long journey to find Jesus, with the hope that He will touch us, and miraculously He will heal us, and now He is sending us away to show our wounds to the priests? Come on, how is Jesus treating us?”

Well, no matter what kind of thoughts they had, **they made a turn** and they went to find a priest to show themselves as Jesus said.

We have to learn to follow Jesus and to do what He is asking from us, even though our “**SMART MIND**” would say something different.

I saw so many similar wonders, when people during the sermon realized, that it is not the minister telling them these things but God. When they started to act according to God's expectations, **their lives were totally changed and renewed.**

And I saw people who had some faith, but they did not want to do what Jesus was expecting from them and, for this, they were not able to change or to be renewed.

The third step of faith: let God work in your life

Remember, these people were totally covered, hiding their wounds. We read that as they made their decision to follow **exactly** what Jesus said to them; on their way, their bodies were totally healed, renewed. They did not see when or how their wounds disappeared. It happened all by the power of God, because they believed in Christ Jesus. They were newly created. God worked again in a mysterious way as when He created heaven and earth or when God resurrected our Lord Jesus Christ.

These people first heard that Jesus was God, and now they experienced Him and His power on their own. Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only a teacher but also a healer, and we should not forget this. He is not just teaching us what we should know about God's love and God's grace, but:

- He is merciful;
- He is listening to our prayers;
- He steps close to us in our needs;
- He touches our wounds; and
- He has the power to heal our ill bodies and our broken spirit.

When we are physically ill or we feel broken and depressed because of all the problems and pain we experience, we lose our happiness, our joy, and much more, and we cannot even plan the future. When Jesus heals us, He heals the body and the spirit, and gives back everything that we previously lost. He can restore us. He gives us back not only what we lost, but also He can enrich us much more than we can even imagine.

The fourth step of faith: be thankful

When these 10 people showed themselves to the priests and got the certificate that they were clean, one person, the Samaritan, went back to find Jesus, to say thanks to Him and to glorify God. The other 9, who were Jews, went on their own ways, enjoying themselves.

What do you think, **were these 10 people just lucky**, or did they receive God's mercy by grace? I met people who shared with me their story saying how "lucky" they were. Others were saying that "somebody" or the "goodness" was helping them. When I challenged them, asking why they don't say that they were healed,

saved or protected by GOD's grace, they said: "well we could say this way as well." Even Christians are saying things like:

- Oh, I was lucky that I did not get into an accident, or
- SOMEBODY was watching over me, or
- the OLD GUY kept me safe.

I have physical pain, when people are saying things like that. Why can't we confess that the good and merciful God kept His arms around me and this is how I was healed, saved, protected? Why do we have problems to confess that we do believe in God and we belong to Him? Are we ashamed that we have such a wonderful God like Jesus Christ?

This one person takes the effort to find Jesus again because Jesus was the only one who helped him. He was asking for help from Jesus and now he feels forced to say thanks to Jesus. He humbles himself again before Jesus, and he opens his heart and mouth praising Jesus for His endless mercy and power. He falls into the dust in front of Jesus as he prays.

If we analyze the original text in Greek, in the word which talks about this person's humbleness, we find the main word of dog. He is curling at the feet of Jesus, as the dog is laying and curling at his owner's feet as he says thanks to Jesus. He is acknowledging: "Lord, from You I got something for free. It was grace and mercy. I did not desire that. I was crying out to You and You were gracious.

For the other 9 people, it was **not** important to find Jesus again and to say thanks to Him. They were done with Jesus. But this one person felt it was very important to come back to Jesus in thanksgiving. The others took everything for granted.

In these moments, this man built for himself a deep relationship with Jesus. For him, this relationship was very important. The Lord Jesus was encouraging him and gave him something more to continue his life in peace and joy. In those moments, Jesus started a personal conversation with him about his eternal life that he will spend in God's glory in Heaven.

The other 9 people were healed only physically. Only this one, was healed spiritually as well, and only this one got the promise that he will enter into heaven, just because only he was able to say THANKS to Jesus.

The Bible is full with advice and encouragement about THANKSGIVING. This has to be part of a Christian. Praise the Lord and don't forget all His benefits.