



Iglesia de Santa Maria, Melide (Church of Saint Mary, Melide, Spain)

“Were Not Ten Made Clean?”

Luke 17:11-19

*On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.*

This church goes back at least to the later Medieval Age (1300-1400). It is interesting in that it had a specialized ministry. The story has it that they ran a nearby house for lepers, what was known as a leprosarium. Only lepers could stay there. For many lepers, after they discovered they had leprosy (which back then there were several skin conditions which may have been mistaken for leprosy), they almost always left their families and were sequestered off into a new community of lepers, kind of their new family. It was a very difficult thing to do and very heartbreaking as you might imagine. But if you didn’t want any members of your family to get leprosy, that was what you did. Things are different today. But back then, many faced that decision. What is also sad about this facility is that this was as close to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela any lepers were allowed to get. *It was still 34 miles*

*away*. They would *never* see worship in the great Cathedral. Any worship the community of lepers had was almost always only among themselves. Not in the local cathedral, even not in the little church nearby. Only rarely was there even a guest preacher. Francis of Assisi visited and preached to a colony of lepers later in his career, but that behavior was rare among clergy. No video tape, or livestreaming of a service in which to vicariously take part. They were mostly on their own.

We find ourselves in a similar circumstance. In this COVID-19 “shelter in place” self-quarantine, we all might feel a bit like we are the lepers, that we are unclean (but I assure you, they had it much worse!). It is certainly true, if we did not mostly stay apart, that contagion would spread and make many more Americans ill, some seriously ill, and the hospitals would be more than overwhelmed.

There is something crucial to remember. While we can’t “do church” in the same building (and I believe any who do are being very irresponsible), we can always still worship. Nothing can take that freedom from us, nor dampen the desire, or remove the need. God needs to receive our worship. We need to give it. We need to keep our relationship with God active and vital. It will make a very positive difference in the coming days and weeks. One way we can keep worshipping, is that if you are able to do so, to send in a gift to the church by mail, or online (see church website). Another way is that at 10:45 a.m. every Sunday morning, knowing others are doing the same thing at the same time, we can read the liturgy I will send out and continue with the brief sermon and benediction. I am still working on trying to get something online, via several avenues (and everybody thinks I need to use their favorite avenue) but to keep from getting so frustrated I throw the entire computer out the window, I am limiting my efforts to keep from getting to that point! Well, this week I at least learned how to save a document in a PDF format and send that! I guess I am behind the curve, but I didn’t know there was a curve to get behind! I will try to figure out how to do a “sound file” but not sure where to look.

Notice these ten lepers, when they saw Jesus, kept their distance. They had to practice “social distancing” according to the laws and customs of the time, to keep from spreading the disease. They don’t ask for healing, just mercy, and are healed anyway! Then only one returns to praise God and thank Jesus. That ratio is 9 to 1. The thankfulness ratio there is not very good. I know it is hard to stay out of social contact with friends and sometimes family. But I want you to think of this: be thankful for the nine folks (at least) you did *not* infect by regularly staying put. Be thankful they will not get sick from you and that you will *not* get sick from them.

Sometimes we don’t need tremendous, amazing, and showy miracles of healing from God. Sometimes it is the small and simple things that make all the difference in the life of another, or in your own life. Right now that small and simple thing is staying put. And, oh yeah, WASH YOUR HANDS! Amen.

Things to think about:

1. Is Grace Church the type of church that would support a leprosarium?
2. Draw 10 stick figures and another for Jesus. Circle one of the stick figures. One is not very many compared to the other nine, is it? 90% did NOT think of returning their praise to God for the miracle. Why are people so ungrateful? Have you ever been ungrateful? Confess that to God and others, if they are with you.
3. Thank each person with you for who they are or for what they do for you or others.
4. What are you most thankful for right now?