

O God be in my mouth as I speak for you and fill this place with your great grace, that we may leave this place less of what we used to be and more of what we ought to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

When I was in the Emergency room this past summer with kidney stones, this was probably my favorite prayer, along with someone please bring me some more morphine.

There is no denying this simple prayer is a good one for all of us to know whether we have kidney stones, or once put a dent in your parent’s car.

And if I did an informal congregational poll this morning, most of you would probably admit to having said this prayer to yourself at some point in your life when the chips were down and you found yourself struggling.

Our story this morning from Luke’s gospel describes one of these moments in human life where Jesus helps folks make that journey from despair to hope, from death to life.

As in most of the stories we hear about Jesus, it is really a story about our own lives, about our own deaths and about the choices we make in human life.

It is a simple story, very familiar to us, but also like the story of Lazarus and the Rich man from a few weeks ago, it can be easy to miss what is really going on.

We first need to remember what it meant to be a leper in Jesus' day. It was worse than being dead. Lepers were considered evil and unclean according to the law.

They were outcasts from community life, they could not live, worship, eat, walk or talk among so called normal people.

The terrible progress of the disease was far from the worst thing they suffered.

They had nothing, no hope and according to Jewish law had to watch the real world go by from forty paces away.

These ten lepers met Jesus. They stood at the required distance and shouted for mercy.

I am sure it was a prayer they had shouted many times before to other holy men or religious charlatans, master have mercy on us.

A good prayer, a prayer that in this case was granted, Jesus showed them mercy. No reason was given or needed for Jesus' action. He just did it.

Jesus in this one extraordinary act gave them their lives back. They each made that journey from despair to hope.

He told them to present themselves to a priest. Now, this was more of a medical act than a religious one.

The priests were the ones who certified that the lepers were cured and could rejoin the community.

These ten people had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so they went off to the city to find some priests and as they went their leprosy was miraculously cured.

Jesus stood there and watched. He gave them back their lives, he put no conditions on the gift and as he stood there, our Lord watched and waited.

Nine of these ten lepers though just kept on going. If you had stopped and asked them, they would have probably told you they weren't ungrateful.

They probably were so overcome with joy they were busy making plans for the new life they had been given.

If you could have found a way to slow them down, they probably would have told you that God was great for granting their request and that Jesus was the most wonderful person in the whole world.

But it would have been hard to catch them. So much to do....so little time.

No the issue in our story wasn't gratitude. The issue wasn't feeling good about Jesus or anything like that.

The issue was that for those who had received so much from God, for those who had gone from a living death to a new resurrected life these nine former lepers were running in the wrong direction.

As a friend of mine once wrote, “they were so full of what they had received, of their gift, that there was just no room for the giver, the source of the gift.

They weren’t ungrateful, just busy. That’s all, they were so terribly busy. And that is my friend wrote, describes most of us, our own lives, in one small bitter nutshell.

It’s impossible not to see ourselves in this story, impossible for us not to ask questions. What direction are we running? What are we running toward? What are we running from? What are we leaving behind?

How often do we stop or even slow down long enough to pay some attention, not only to our gifts not only to all we have but also to the giver, to the source of it all.

Are we so busy running my friends, so busy using what we have, that we miss the source of all that we have been given?

Jesus, Master have mercy on us.

Of course, the story goes onto tell us that one person got it. One person came back. Only one was drawn back to Jesus and not away from him by the wonderful gift of new life.

And this one alone received the fullness of what Jesus had to give.

The English version of the story makes it a bit more difficult to see. All ten lepers were cured, the Greek verb in the story is a medical term and it means their disease went away.

All ten stay cured, whether they came back or not. God gives freely without conditions.

But to the one who came back, to the one who saw what was going on most clearly, to him and to only him something more was said.

To him, Jesus said, Rise up and go your way, your faith has made you well.

The Greek for “Made you well” is a different word, a theological word, it means being made whole or being made complete.

It means being saved.

Go your way, Jesus tells him, your faith has made you not only cured but whole once again.

All ten were healed, all ten were given their lives back, but Jesus you see had more to give than simply that.

That’s why our Lord watched and waited, that’s why coming back was so important, because Jesus had so much more to give.

The story reminds us too, that the one who came back was a Samaritan, a foreigner. That's important.

The one who came back, the one who actually gave thanks to Jesus, and did something different from the others was a foreigner, an outcast among outcasts.

This was certainly not coincidence. And I think the hard part of this story is realizing that if we are going to discover fully what the tenth leper discovered. And what it means for Jesus to say to us, *Get up and go your way; your faith had made you well, we have to discover what it means to be a foreigner.*

We must discover what it means to belong somewhere else, for our loyalties to lie somewhere else.

You see the one who came back to Jesus, didn't quite fit in as well as the others. He didn't belong to the world quite as much as the others.

So he alone could see clearly. He could see beyond the gift, beyond all that the others thought they had to do.

The other nine were too blind to see what our Lord was trying to give them, because they were too busy, getting back to their place, their position in society.

This is a hard message to hear. We too have been long established in this land, and we are all so busy, with so much that we think we have to lose.

It is hard to imagine what it might mean for us to be an outsider.

But remember my friends that only the foreigner looked back.

Only the foreigner looked beyond the gift to the one who gave it.
Only the foreigner received all that Jesus had to give.

The rest of us I'm afraid, were just too busy.

Jesus Master, have mercy on all of us this morning who think that we are, too busy.