



Luke 17:11-19
 Not Famous, But Known
 “The One Who Came Back”

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Today we wrap up the series we’ve been in for the past three weeks, titled “Not Famous, But Known.” Throughout this series, we’ve looked at every day, ordinary people Jesus ministered to or highlighted as examples of faith. They may not be famous, but Jesus knew their stories, saw their needs, or recognized their faith—and he lifts them up as examples for us to follow.

Next Sunday we’ll begin a new Advent series (**Graphic**) that will carry us through Christmas Eve. We’ll look at several Gospel events leading up to Jesus’ birth, and each week we’ll include a Christmas hymn that grows directly out of that Sunday’s passage. While hymns and worship songs are first and foremost expressions of praise to God, they also teach us who God is—and Christmas hymns in particular teach us about the birth of Jesus. But today, we close out our current series. (**Back to current graphic.**)

This morning’s passage fits the series title well. It’s not a famous passage, and it’s not about a famous person. In fact, it’s not even a particularly well-known story. But I hope that after today, it’s known to us—and that God uses it to lead us into a deeper place of discipleship to Jesus. Our passage is **Luke 17:11–19**. This is the Word of the Lord...

Between this sermon series and the previous one—both in Luke—we’ve been reminded several times that Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9). **Verse 11 reiterates it with this: “Now on his way to Jerusalem...”** This passage takes place during Jesus’ journey toward his appointment with the cross.

Galilee lies north of Samaria. And just to remind you: At this time, Samaritans were considered “half-breeds” by many Jews because of their mixed heritage and religious practices. There was longstanding animosity between Jews and Samaritans. Many Jews who needed to travel from one region to another would go around Samaria—adding days to their trip—just to avoid passing through.

Here, Jesus is traveling along the border between Galilee and Samaria as he heads south toward Judea and Jerusalem. Ten men with leprosy meet him. **Verse 18 (“no one returned but this foreigner?”) strongly implies that nine were Jewish and one was a Samaritan.** (Virtually all commentators read it that way.) Seeing them together may seem surprising, knowing that Jews and Samaritans did not normally associate with one another. But shared suffering often dissolves social boundaries. It’s like UW Huskies and WSU Cougars finding unity in rooting against the Ducks or the Trojans. It’s amazing how a common enemy can unite people, right? Leprosy brought these ten together.

Leviticus 13 and 14 gave specific instructions for how to handle leprosy, which really was a collection of various skin illnesses that we’re able to differentiate between today, but they were not. And so these ten men would be living on the outskirts of society because of their disease. And this borderland between Galilee and Samaria is exactly where you’d expect a mixed group of outcasts to end up.

From a distance—they had to keep their distance—they cry out, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests, who were the ones responsible for declaring someone clean and restoring them to society. As they obey and go, Luke tells us they are cleansed; they’re healed of their leprosy.

Verse 15 says, “One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.” We might wonder whether he came back immediately or after seeing the priest and being declared clean. In his commentary on Luke, John Calvin suggests that it was likely after being declared clean, as that is what allowed him to re-enter society. And, it’s what Jesus told them to do. Either way, he returns praising God. Verse 16 tells us he thanks Jesus—and that this man was a Samaritan.

Jesus then asks where the other nine are. Weren’t all ten healed? Why didn’t they return to give praise to God? And then, to the one who did return—kneeling at his feet—Jesus says, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

So, let me share a few observations and an application from each one to consider in our own lives. Today is a four-point sermon, which is probably too much to really absorb, so choose one or two that resonate with you.

First, notice that all 10 of them had some measure of faith in Jesus even though they're on the margins of society. They collectively cry out to Jesus, seeking healing. They have some measure of faith that he can heal them.

The word they use to address him is “Master.” The Greek word is “epistatace”. It is only found in Luke’s Gospel, and other than this instance, is only used by Jesus’ disciples. So, it’s a word that indicates discipleship to Jesus. These guys, in some sense, are disciples of Jesus. So, the first point of application is that: **First, Jesus reaches those on the margins.** You may not be or feel famous, well-put together, financially fit, or spiritually impressive. You may be on the margins of society yourself – socially, economically, relationally, or some other way. But Jesus welcomes you. He is for you. He cares for you and meets you when you come to him in faith.

Then, in spite of this faith, notice that they keep their distance from Jesus as they cry out to him. Yes, this is required because of their disease—it’s part of what Leviticus says about how to handle this. But there’s a spiritual reality we can take from this as well, and it’s the second thing to highlight: **Second, sometimes faith and trusting Jesus begins at a bit of a distance.**

This is good news for long-time followers of Jesus and those who are seeking and wondering about Jesus. For those in the second group: You may be approaching Jesus cautiously; curious but unsure, checking him out from a bit of a distance: Jesus will listen and meet you in your place of need and place of faith, however small that faith may be, or distanced from him you may be. In fact, we all start in that place.

And then for those who have followed Jesus for years or decades...this is good news as well, because: **We all have times where we are distanced from Jesus.** Maybe you haven’t been part of a church community for a couple years and you’re just getting back into that; maybe your personal

Bible reading and prayer time has waned; maybe you've never stepped fully into serving others like Jesus modeled. ("Going to Church" on Sundays, and checking that box may be all you've really engaged in.) Maybe some sin continues to lurk at your door and you fall to temptation and feel particularly distanced from Jesus (sin always does that). You may feel distant for any number of reasons. But Jesus still listens, still heals, still ministers to you. His life, death, and resurrection still have power for you.

Third, faith means trusting Jesus even when we can't yet see the results. Their healing happened as they were obedient to Jesus' command to go to the priest. They weren't healed first and then told to go. And so, by going, they are trusting that Jesus is going to heal them somehow by the time they get to the priest.

The same is true in our own lives and in our church. 2 ½ years ago or so, the Elders of our church along with a few of the staff, engaged in an intentional process of listening to God, each other, our church, and the community around us, to discern how we could grow as disciples of Jesus and better meet the needs in our community. That 2-3 month process culminated in a weekend retreat with one of our denominational leaders and led us to our vision (all together): **"Rose Hill Church's vision is to lead people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play."** It's a vision of discipleship, because we each need to be led toward Jesus, that sends each of us on mission right here on the Eastside to lead others toward him as well. (And beyond with Global missions, Christmas shoeboxes, etc., too)

Like the ten in today's passage, we have stepped forward in faith, trusting Jesus but not knowing the future outcomes. We are trusting Jesus to work as we go. Who we are now as a church is not the finished product, and we are intentionally reviewing our ministries and discipleship process, so we have a clear discipleship path for each person who calls Rose Hill home. And that's in process. So, God is still forming Rose Hill, just as he is still forming each of us individually. I'm excited for our future because I believe God will do great things as we continue to trust him—even when the results are not yet visible.

And then finally, we see that: **Fourth, being made fully well by Jesus comes from a faith that leads us back to him in gratitude.** For the one whose faith led him back to Jesus to express his gratitude, he's not just healed, but he's made well. All 10 were healed of leprosy. But nine didn't return to give thanks to Jesus, and as a result they actually missed out on further blessing; they missed out on being made truly whole.

The root word for "has made you well" is the Greek word *sozo*. It's frequently translated as "saved." It was used in last week's passage when Jesus told the woman at the dinner party that her faith had saved her. It could be translated much the same here.

And there's something about in faith returning to Jesus, full of gratitude, to give him praise and glory that brings a further dimension of healing and wellness and salvation. It's a different word than used earlier about all ten being cleansed – in fact, there are two words used earlier, for "cleansed" and "healed." *Sozo* is a third one that Jesus now uses in this last verse.

This posture of gratitude is the root of our worship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we have no gratitude for what God has done in Jesus (like the cross and empty tomb) and continues to do through the Holy Spirit (healing, wisdom, opening and closing doors of life, etc.)...if we have no gratitude for those kinds of things, then we will never truly worship God. We're in a season of thanks right now, of course, but for the Christian, it's a year-round thing. Let's live in a posture of gratitude, and let our praise and glory of God, our worship, spring up out of hearts that are filled with gratitude, as we see with this one who returned.

To recap:

- 1. Jesus reaches those on the margins;**
- 2. Faith can begin at a distance;**
- 3. Faith trusts Jesus even before seeing results;**
- 4. Full "saving"/being "made well" comes when faith leads us back to Jesus in gratitude.**

I encouraged you earlier to pick one or two points you felt God was impressing upon you in particular: but I want to emphasize this fourth one. This Samaritan ex-leper—whose name we’ll never know until heaven—is the example Jesus wants us to follow. Jesus expresses surprise that the others didn’t return, and he gives this man a unique blessing because his faith led him back to Jesus.

Let’s keep coming back to Jesus in gratitude. We do this in our everyday lives—where we live, work, and play—but Jesus clearly expects us to do this together, as a community, as a gathering of people. The word for “church” in the New Testament, including on Jesus’ lips when he says, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), is the word Ekklesia. It simply means “community.” So, “I will build my community” is what the people would have understood him to be saying. Calling it “church” is fine, because that’s what Jesus’ community is. We don’t know why the other nine didn’t return or whether the one encouraged them to join him. But let’s not make the mistake of going to Jesus alone (not criticizing the one guy – it’s the others who didn’t go), apart from the community (ekklesia) God designed us for and that Jesus is building.

Surveys show that about 30% of Americans say they attend church regularly (62% say they’re Christian). But more careful studies suggest the real number is closer to 5–15%. Here in the Seattle area, given we’re one of the two least-churched regions in the nation, it’s likely on the lower end. Let’s be generous and say 10%: 1 in 10 attend church regularly around here. That is the same percentage that returned to Jesus in our passage. **There is so much room for people to come back to Jesus.**

With Advent starting next week, we have a beautiful annual opportunity to help more people return to Jesus just like we do each week. Some of these people (50% or so around here, let’s say) would call themselves followers of Jesus at some level, but they’re keeping a distance. Some of those people feel unworthy or unwelcome or on the margins of society. Some already have some faith, but are keeping a distance, perhaps struggling to trust God, or pride, schedule, or stuff, is in the way. But there’s an opportunity with people who you and I undoubtedly already know (family, friends, classmates, co-

workers), to invite them to take a step of faith, with gratitude in their hearts, and join with us in worship.

So, maybe one of the other points from this passage also resonates with you (on the margins, from a distance, blind faith). Or maybe God has put something else on your heart. No matter what it is that he's impressing upon you this morning: just like this guy who came back to Jesus in gratitude, let's be sure we do the same thing and give all the praise, all the honor, and all the glory to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's pray...Amen.