

STREET PASTORS / LEPERS

This sermon followed an interview with volunteer street pastors from our congregation.

The reading today of the ten lepers is the one set for this Sunday around the world.

It wasn't set for a Sunday featuring Street Pastors.

I got to thinking if there was some connection...

There's different messages in that story that you might hear sermons on.

For example there's the bit about '*taking that first step*' that I spoke to the young people about.

The men were challenged by Jesus to trust him and step out in faith by showing themselves to the priest who was the person who could declare them clean.

The healing came about *after* they took that step.

Another angle you will hear about is the most obvious thing at the end of the the story: the fact that only one person out of the ten came back to Jesus to offer thanks.

It's a story that questions our ability to be thankful - to be grateful. So ministers will preach about the need to be aware of our blessings and to live thankfully.

Apart from that being the 'right' thing to do, it makes sense for this reason too - that our happiness level is connected to our gratitude level.

The more thankful we are, the more content we are.

Or conversely, the more we moan and take everything for granted with no appreciation for the blessings we have - the less full and meaningful our lives become.

Being grateful makes sense for us.

It makes our lives richer and more joyful and increases our sense of wellbeing.

And of course it connects us to our Creator God who has given us all good things.

Another good angle for a sermon is to do with the subject of being outcast.

Jesus was always inviting outcasts back into the circle - always looking to **include** the people that others wanted to **exclude**.

Each one of the ten men were outcast by virtue of their disease. But one of them was doubly outcast - because even if he became well he would be shunned because of his nationality - he was a Samaritan - regarded as a half-breed by the Jews.

How ironic that he is the one who actually takes the time and trouble to thank Jesus.

All of these angles are good for sermons and worth reflecting on.

But this morning let me finish by mentioning one more that I have never thought much about before.

How about looking at the story through the actions of Jesus rather than the actions (or inactions) of the ten men?

Lets think about the incident from Jesus' point of view.

He has reached out to heal these guys and yet only one has time to thank him. If you turn it into a statistic then 90% of the people he healed that day didn't even say thanks.
It's a pretty poor stat.

And I think that the fact that Jesus pointed it shows that he was saddened by that fact.

But do you think that Jesus then thought to himself,
"Well I'll not be doing that again. I'll not make that mistake in the future. I'm not going to waste time with people who don't respond more positively. Why should I get involved with people who don't even offer a word of thanks in return. I'm not going to waste time with people like that."

Do you think Jesus then went on to say,
"From now on I will show compassion and concern and healing to those who deserve it more. I will show compassion and concern and healing to those who will respond more positively. I will show compassion and concern and healing to those who will take time to be thankful. I will show compassion and concern and healing to those who appreciate how important I am and recognise what I've just done for them. "

Jesus would never say anything like that.

Because Jesus' motivation was always to help people in need wherever they were – with no strings attached – with no demand for a response – with no conditions laid down.

So when people might wonder what's the point of Street Pastors encountering young folks staggering out of nightclubs in the early hours of the morning, when so many will be well drunk or high on drugs, then the point is that care and support are offered for their own sake.

It's hard to have meaningful conversations with people who are high or drunk. Maybe its not hard having serious conversation with such people but its hard to imagine anything is going to stick as the chances are that the person you are speaking to will not remember anything about the conversation in the morning.

If you want to speak about your faith and have a meaningful discussion about faith then let's face it – groups of drunk people aren't the ideal group to start with.

And maybe that's the point – it's not about setting up deep conversations on the subject of faith in Jesus but just serving and helping and supporting people and showing practical love.

Jesus cared for people and supported people and healed them for their own sake.

Yes, he had a message to proclaim, and a challenge to deliver – he called on folk to follow in his footsteps.

This was central to Jesus.

As it should be for us.

But he never made responding to that a condition for his attention and love.

Jesus offered that love to others for its own sake, and we as his followers are called to do the same.

Luke 17:11-19

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