

Curing and healing. The Gospel writers use these terms interchangeably. But curing is not the same as healing. I once met a woman in a hospital lobby who was waiting for her ex-husband to pick her up. She had just learned that her the treatments for a rather nasty infection had worked. The miracle of modern medicine had just put months of weakness and pain behind her. Yet there she sat, angry at her ex-husband for being late and somehow blaming her sister for the disease that was now gone from her system. In short, she was *cured*, but not *healed*.

I knew another woman who fought a particularly aggressive form of cancer for many years. In the last weeks of her life, she sat down with all of her friends and family to talk about whatever she needed to say to them before she died. In one of those conversations, she pushed me toward ordination. One by one, we each had the opportunity to talk about how we loved each other, to ask forgiveness or give forgiveness, to promise that she would never be forgotten or just to express our gratitude for each other. The cancer finally did kill her the day after I had brought her communion, but her relationships were complete. She died *healed*, but not *cured*.

At the end of our reading, Jesus says: “Having risen up, be going; your *faith* has made you whole.” And the Greek word we hear translated into English as “whole” is not the same word for “cured.” There is a difference between the two and the difference matters to this story from Luke. Faith is the crucial key for understanding the difference.

We have been hearing Jesus talk about faith for several weeks now. You may remember that the Hebrew word we translate into English as “faith” is *‘emunah* — a word that refers to the attitude and action of a person who trusts and hopes, but who abandons outcomes to God.

This morning, Luke reminds us that Jesus has turned his face to Jerusalem, the political and theological center of power, where he will be crucified. On his way, Jesus met ten marginalized people in the marginal space between Samaria and Galilee. Luke often uses geography to point to a spiritual landscape, so this is our signal to listen for spiritual truths. This story takes place

on the borderland between Jesus' Jewish homeland of Galilee and the land of the Samaritans, the Jews who remained in the Northern Kingdom after the Assyrians had deported the ten tribes to Babylon. The Samaritans were, in short, the "wrong" Jews—they worshipped in the "wrong" city, they didn't keep the right practices and they used the "wrong" scripture.

Here in this in-between place, Luke's Greek manuscript says that Jesus meets "ten leprous men," not ten lepers. For Luke, leprosy is an *accidental* quality of these men whose humanity is the *essential* quality of their being. That small distinction has implications. More and more healthcare practitioners are recognizing that an organ or body system has a disease, and the person has an experience of that disease. Any number of interventions – medical, chemical, prayer – might overcome the disease, but the person's experience of the illness is overcome only by engaging the whole person – body, mind and spirit.

The ten leprous men recognize Jesus and, speaking with one voice, they call to him by name. And in asking for mercy, for the first time in Luke, people who are not his disciples refer to Jesus as "Master." Jesus and the ten men with leprosy see past each other's surface appearance to see each other's essential qualities.

Consequently, Jesus does not need to lift a finger, say a prayer or wipe mud on anyone. He simply tells them to keep on their way and show themselves to the priests. In leaving him, the Greek text says, "it happened that they were cleansed." Showing oneself to the priest was an essential step for the Galilean men to be made ritually clean and welcomed or permitted back into the community. There is reasonable speculation that Jesus told the men to show themselves to the priests—plural—in recognition of at least two ways of being Jewish in the world.

As all ten are leaving, one man sees that he has been made clean, and turns back to fall face-down at Jesus' feet in a posture of worship to express his gratitude.

Now, it is important to point out that the other nine did nothing wrong. In fact, they did exactly as they were told and they received the blessing of being cleansed. We don't get to know whether they were healed when they returned to their families and communities.

The one who turned back actually disobeyed Jesus. Instead of going to show a priest, he turned back to Jesus. Jesus did not chastise him for disobeying, but neither did he repeat his instruction to go see a priest. Perhaps the Samaritan needed no further institutional validation. Or perhaps God's cleansing gift was sufficient to return him to community. In any case, he was cured. And, for that, he was grateful.

And it was his *gratitude* that made him whole. Gratitude can make any of us whole. Gratitude is an excellent practice for developing ourselves as faithful people who trust in God and who hope, and who even pray for cures, but who still abandon all outcomes to God.

A friend of mine, Brother David Steindl-Rast, is a Benedictine monk who has devoted his life to teaching the practice of gratitude. He describes the gift of gratitude as the sudden sense that can come upon us like it did for the Samaritan man in Luke's story. Gratitude dawns on us in the awareness that we belong in the world, that we belong to life and that we belong to God.

Br. David says that gratefulness can come over any of us when someone *gives* us something that we find *valuable*. "These two things have to come together," Br. David says. "It has to be something valuable, and has to be a genuine gift. You haven't bought it. You haven't earned it. You haven't traded it in. You haven't worked for it. It's just given to you¹." When these two things come together, Br. David says, gratefulness spontaneously rises in our hearts and happiness follows. That's how gratefulness happens.

But we can also *cultivate* gratitude as a practice. Br. David's approach is no more complicated than what we teach children about crossing the street. Stop. Look. Go. That's all. We can build stop signs into our lives—reminders to stop long enough to quiet the demands and pressures of everyday life. The silence of a Sunday morning in a sanctuary is an exceptional opportunity to stop.

The next move is to *look*. Look for what God has freely given just like the Samaritan man saw. Open your eyes, your ears, your nose. Practice opening all your senses in this sanctuary for the incredible richness that God gives to us. Open your senses to the astonishing truth and beauty and goodness that God pours into this world. And then open and lift your hearts to the opportunities God

¹ Personal communication.

gives us to help others, to forgive each other, to give companionship, joy or comfort or to others.

When we open our hearts to these opportunities, the opportunities invite us into the third move. To go. When Jesus says “Go on your way” to the Samaritan, the implication is missional, as if to say: “Having risen up, pursue the journey that you have now embraced.” Or as Br. David says, “Really *do* something. Do whatever life offers to you in that present moment.”

Frequently, what life offers is the opportunity to enjoy. Other times, life offers more difficult opportunities. But the *opportunity*, Br. David says, is the deeper gift within every gift. Every new moment is a new gift, over and over again. In every moment that God gives, we can be grateful for the opportunity. Even when we are confronted with difficulties, we can rise to the challenge and respond to the opportunity that is given to us.

When we are grateful, we are not fearful. When we are grateful, we share from of a sense of abundance. When we are grateful, we enjoy the differences between people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

In just a few minutes, we will have an opportunity to express our gratitude to God. That’s what the word “eucharist” means: to give thanks. With one voice, we will speak the teachings of the church and then ask God to make us clean. Then we will give gifts back to God created from God’s abundance given to us. Now, if you want to be whole, let me remind you that in Thomas Cranmer’s Eucharistic Prayer that we use for Rite 1, we are also offering and presenting to God “our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice” to God. *You* are the gift *given* to God—a gift that God *values*.

Then we will lift our hearts to God, just like the Samaritan man who saw and took his opportunity to give thanks to God because it is a good and joyful thing to do. Take this holy opportunity. Stop. Look. Then having risen up, pursue the journey that you have embraced. Your faith will make you whole.