

**SERMON OXLEY 13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2013**

**PENTECOST 21**

**Luke 17: 11-19**

**The story of the ten lepers being healed by Jesus makes the obvious point of the importance of gratitude. Jesus tells ten lepers to go and see the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem. They set off and on the way they are healed. Nine continue on their journey. One returns to thank Jesus. And he wasn't even a Jew. He was a Samaritan. His religion was a hybrid one - of no worth at all as far as the Jews were concerned.**

**We tend to think of the nine who failed to return to thank Jesus as being ungrateful. But were they? Didn't they do exactly what Jesus told them to do? He told them to go and see the priests, and that's what they were doing. How can we criticise them?**

**Well, Jesus apparently did. 'Were not all ten men cleansed?' he said to the one who returned. 'Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?' Doesn't that sound a bit tough?**

**It might sound a bit tough, but Jesus is stressing a vital point -**

**the fundamental duty that we have to praise God for all his blessings.**

**Now, we might think sometimes, that life is so hard, we haven't got much to thank God for. When we are struggling with infirmity, when we lose a loved one to an untimely death, when we agonise over how we are going to meet our budget, when we see on our television screens the most unspeakable crimes against humanity being committed, it is hard sometimes to get into the right mood to praise God. Perhaps if we saw the kind of miracle these ten lepers saw, we might feel more like praising God.**

**And yet people in the most dire circumstances have found it in their heart to be positive. Jeremiah wrote words to the Jewish exiles in Babylon that they would have found hard to understand. He told them to build houses and settle down; to plant gardens, to marry and raise families, and to pray to God for the peace and prosperity of Babylon.**

**How could Jeremiah write that? Had he forgotten what Nebuchadnezzar had done to Jerusalem? Had he forgotten that he and his forces had destroyed the city, and raised the Temple to the ground? Had he forgotten that they had carted**

**off to Babylon the bulk of the Jewish population? How could he be encouraging them to settle down in Babylon and pray for it?**

**Because they, the Jews, were still God's people. Wherever they were, God was with them. However bad things were around them, they still had his word to read. They knew that God was far greater than Nebuchadnezzar or any of his successors. He was the God who had rescued their ancestors in a miraculous way from slavery in Egypt. He was the God who had enabled them to win impossible battles against awesome enemies in Caanan. And, above all, he was the God who had promised to send a Messiah to defeat all the enemies of God's people.**

**Well, in a sense, Jeremiah's message is a message for us. We are to settle down in this world that daily offers horrific evidence of the power of evil. We are to pray for its peace and prosperity. We are not to wallow in paranoia. We are to confront the terrible things that are going on and in whatever way we can, to try to remedy them. We are definitely not to insulate ourselves from this modern Babylon. Rather, we are to pray for its peace and prosperity.**

**But the sole leper who came back to thank Jesus had just seen**

something supernatural happen. He had just witnessed a miracle. We are not surprised that he came back to thank Jesus. Rather, we are surprised that the other nine didn't. Sure, they were following Jesus' instructions. They were on their way to the Temple to see the priests to fulfil their ritual obligation. But surely a half hour's delay to return to thank Jesus would not have upset their schedule very much.

What tends to make us critical of the nine lepers who didn't return is that cases of miraculous healing are rare these days. When was the last time any of us saw a case of dramatic spiritual healing of the sort that these ten lepers saw? You might say, 'Well, I had a heart bypass operation that saved my life. I regard that as a miracle.' Yes, perhaps, we have the right to describe that as a miracle in which God was involved. After all, the operation was made possible only because the medical profession has been able to analyse the remarkable structure of God's handiwork - the human body. We should certainly give thanks to God for that.

But to pray for healing and for that healing to occur? Willow Creek Church in America is one of the leading churches offering spiritual healing. They have admitted that less than ten percent of the people they have prayed for have been

**physically healed.**

**Perhaps our definition of healing is too narrow? As well as physical healing, is there not also emotional healing and spiritual healing. I think most of us can say that we have seen more cases of emotional or spiritual healing than physical healing, in answer to prayer. Nevertheless, shouldn't God be thanked for those?**

**Actually, it's hard to separate all forms of healing. Body, mind and spirit are linked inextricably in the human person. If you heal the body, you also simultaneously heal the mind and in many cases the spirit as well. More importantly, if you heal the spirit, you add new life to both the mind and the body.**

**Now, God's word tells us that the whole world, both natural and human, is in need of healing. The world is clearly not as it should be. The world that God created was a good world, imbued with harmony, goodness and peace. It could not have been anything else. An altogether loving and holy God could not have created the world of chaos and violence and decadence that we see around us.**

**Many try to diagnose the problem. Some say it's caused by the**

**lack of education. Others say it's just that civilisation has more evolving to take place. Others say that it's all due to the inequalities between various groups.**

**But can we trust these diagnoses? Human beings have been on this earth 300,000 years. How much more evolving has to take place? This is the best educated generation in the history of the human race. It is also the generation that has produced the unleashing of chemical weapons in Syria and the genocides of the Republic of Congo. The modern country that had as its main goal the elimination of inequality, the Soviet Union, was responsible for the death of 21 million dissenters.**

**No, all this makes it hard to escape the reality that the chaotic state of the world has a much deeper seated cause. The word of God gives us the answer. The cause is a spiritual condition called sin. Until that is addressed, the condition will remain. And if it remains, so will the highly-disturbed state of the world.**

**The position then seems hopeless. The same word of God that has diagnosed the problem has been preached and taught for two thousand years. Yet the disease seems as rampant as ever. No supernatural healing of this global condition seems**

apparent. Perhaps individual cases of healing, like that of the ten lepers, may be occurring here and there, but as to the disturbance of the whole of the natural and human world, that seems to be going on unabated. Can we therefore give thanks to God for healing that disease, as the Samaritan leper did for the healing of his?

We can of course think of many things to give thanks to God for - life itself with all its potential, family and friends, the beauty of the natural world and of human artistic creativity. But by far the supremely major thing, or rather the supremely major person, for whom we must praise God continually, is Jesus Christ, God's Son. And the reason? Because in a very real sense, two thousand years ago, he healed the spiritual disease afflicting the whole world .

Let me explain. Jesus had come as the Great Healer to heal the whole created order of the terrible disease that had brought disorder everywhere. He knew of course that the disorder was being caused by God not being honoured and respected as the Creator and Sovereign King. So he came to offer on behalf of the entire created order, the honour and respect that were owed to God. He did it by offering up to God the perfect love and obedience that the rest of the human race could never do.

**Above all, he did it by going through to that supreme act of love and obedience - the giving of his life on a criminal's Cross.**

**But if that was supposed to heal the world's disease why is this planet still in such a mess? Because the healing process is ongoing. Some of us are aware that not all treatments of medical issues work instantaneously. But what evidence is there that Christ's remedy is working at all, outside a minuscule number of individual cases?**

**The one vital bit of evidence, the bit on which the whole of the course of treatment depends, is that empty tomb. A human being had been resurrected. A human being had come through on the other side of death. If God can conquer death, he can conquer anything. We might think sometimes that the forces of evil are winning hands down, but they are no match for a God who can raise his Son from the dead. The days of those satanic forces are numbered. The day of judgment is approaching. How do we know? Because the same word of God that has told us about Christ's first coming has also told us that he will come again. And what will be the purpose of his return? To finish the job that he began two thousand years ago. To completely rid the world of those wicked people who have shown no respect for God or the human beings that he has created. To use the**



**power that raised him from the dead to create a new world - a world that is all light, because he, the Light of the world, will be its Governor. And all those whom a gracious and merciful God invites into this wonderful new world, will inhabit it for ever.**

**Surely that is a far better reason to praise God than being cured of a particular disease such as leprosy, or an emotional problem or even one transformed life, important as all these are. This is healing on a global scale, and that must surely be the supreme reason for giving thanks.**