

# biblical resources

*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!*



Sunday 13 October (28C13) *The cure of the ten lepers*

2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 96 (97); 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

## Your faith has made you well

Luke 17:11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

### Initial Observations

This well-loved and familiar story is found only in Luke's Gospel. It is important to note that the scene takes place on the way to Jerusalem, indicating that it has something to do with the destiny of Jesus and the salvation to be achieved in the Holy City. There are at least four elements in the story of interest: lepers, Samaritans, thanksgiving and faith.

#### *A note on leprosy*

The word leprosy is conventionally



used to translate a Hebrew expression *sara'at*, which almost certainly is not the same as Hansen's disease. Instead, *sara'at* encompassed a variety of conditions which share the feature of discoloration of surfaces, including human skin and the walls of house (Lev 14:34-57). People with *sara'at* were regarded as ritually impure, a condition which rendered those in contact with them also ritually impure. Consequently, they were to be avoided. See below for the regulations on their exclusion.

#### *A note on Samaritans*

The Samaritans are a Hebrew sect, with their own centre of worship on Mount Gerizim. They continue to exist today, claiming to be descendants of the Ephraim and Manasse among the tribes of the Northern kingdom. Stress between Samaritans and Jews is evident in the Persian and Greek periods. In some ways, they are old-fashioned Jews, following YHWH and

limiting the Bible to the Pentateuch alone. Not having undergone the Exile and the radical restructuring of Judaism that took place in the Exile, the differences between Jews and Samaritans become more pronounced. As a result there was considerable propaganda against the Samaritans, claiming they were really foreigners imported who brought with them their own false worship. See below for the propaganda.

### Old Testament Background

The person who has the leprosy disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be dishevelled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Leviticus 13:45-46)

But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived; the people of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the people of Cuth made Nergal, the people of Hamath made Ashima; the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. They also worshiped the Lord and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. So they worshiped the Lord but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. To this day they continue to practice their former customs. (2Kings 17:29-34)

Command the Israelites to put out

of the camp everyone who is leprous, or has a discharge, and everyone who is unclean through contact with a corpse. (Numbers 5:2)

### What kind of writing is this?

This is an action anecdote, told to illustrate the ministry of Jesus to the excluded and the grateful, prayerful response from unexpected quarters.

### New Testament Foreground

“There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:27)

In the New Testament, the Samaritans are mentioned a few times. In Matthew, Jesus instructs his disciples not to visit Samaritan villages (Mt 10:5-6) while in John’s Gospel there is the symbolic encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4). In Luke there are mentioned a few times: Jesus has trouble in the Samaritan villages (9:52-53), but they are mentioned favourably in this story and in the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37).

The parable and the present story share the shock of the good example of the unclean—in our story the man is doubly excluded, both as a Samaritan and as a leper. Samaria was a mission field of the early church as we learn from Acts 8 and John 4.

### St Paul

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:28–29),

### Brief Commentary

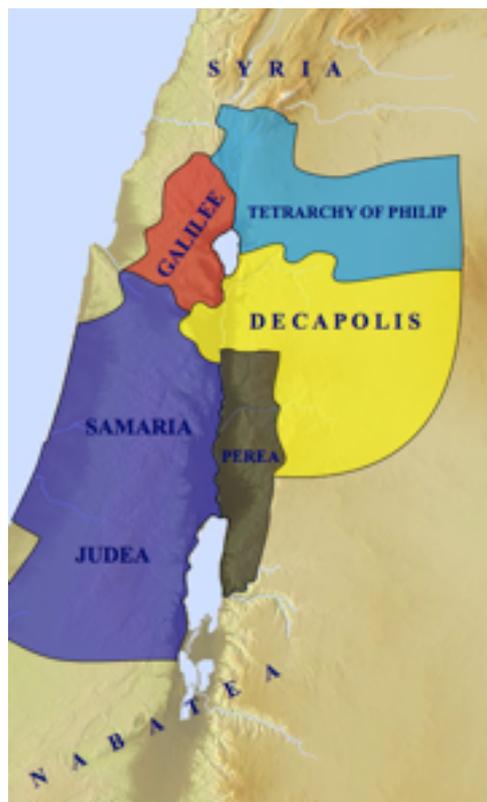
**Verse 11** There is no “region” between Samaria and Galilee and Luke is sometimes vague on geography. He wants to remind us that Jesus is still on his road to Jerusalem and to introduce a context for the story of the lepers.

**Verse 12** The lepers behave very correctly on to injunctions in the

Bible (see above).

**Verse 13** Master: a title elsewhere limited to disciples (Luke 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49). Have mercy: this verb occurs twice more in the Gospel, always as here, in the imperative (16:34; 18:38). On the lips of the rich man in Hades, it has no effect but when addressed to Jesus, the request is successful. Mercy: the heart of salvation (Luke 16:24; 17:13; 18:38–39).

**Verse 14** The miracle is implied by the instruction to go to the priest for confirmation, permitting re-entry



into society. As they go, the unclean discover they have been cleansed.

**Verse 15** Loud voice: a feature in Luke-Acts (Luke 4:33; 8:28; 17:15; 19:37; 23:23, 46; Acts 7:57, 60; 8:7; 14:10; 16:28; 19:34; 26:24).

**Verse 16** Thanksgiving: see the Lord’s Supper, but also the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:11; 22:17, 19). Samaria and Samaritans feature in Luke-Acts (Luke 9:52; 10:33; 17:11, 16; Acts 1:8; 8:1, 5, 9, 14, 25; 9:31; 15:3).

**Verse 17** The rhetorical question is not answered.

**Verse 18** Praising God: a significant feature of the Gospel from start to finish (Luke 2:20; 5:25–26; 7:16;

13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47)

**Verse 19** Compare: And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:50); He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” (Luke 8:48); Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” (Luke 18:42). The Greek word for “made you well” has two meanings. It means both to heal and to save. Luke has both levels in mind. Even the Samaritans (and all outsiders) can be saved by faith.

### Pointers for Prayer

1. The cure of the lepers is not just a physical cure, it was also brought the people healed back from exclusion into the community. Perhaps you have experienced the movement from exclusion to inclusion. What was it like for you to be accepted once again when you had been excluded?

2. Who were the Jesus people for you who brought about this change? For whom have been able to do this, perhaps by healing a rift with a friend, or by listening to the opinion of someone you had dismissed out of hand, or by opening the door in some other way to another?

3. Some people work hard at breaking down barriers in society, seeking inclusion for those who find themselves labelled as lepers by society or by a section of society. Where have you seen this happening? Who has been doing this kind of work? Where is the good news in such action?

4. When we do good for another we may not do it for the thanks we hope to get, but it can hurt when no gratitude is shown. How have you experienced the positive effects of thanks given and received?

### Prayer

O God, our life, our health, our salvation, look with mercy on your people. Stir up in us a saving faith, that believing, we may be healed, and being healed, we may worthily give you thanks.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

# Naaman, the Syrian and leper

*Naaman the Syrian is advised by an Israelite servant girl to go to the prophet in Samaria. He first present himself to the king of Israel and then Elisha enters the story.*

2 Kgs 5:1-7

2 Kgs 5:8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." 11 But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 *So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.*

2 Kgs 5:15 *Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant." 16 But he said, "As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused. 17 Then Naaman said, "If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer*

*offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD. 18 But may the LORD pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count." 19 He said to him, "Go in peace."*

*Elisha's servant Gehazi accepts the gift that Elisha had refused. The prophet catches him out and the punishment is leprosy.*

2 Kgs 5:19b-24

## Initial Observations

The actual reading (in italics) is much shorter. However, as it is not that difficult to explain, it seemed fitting to give something of the longer version (with summaries in boxes). The abbreviation in the lectionary spoils the narrative tensions and makes compromises at the service of prefiguring the cure of the ten lepers.

## Where does the reading come from?

Elisha is a legendary wonder-worker from the ninth century BC. His stories may be found in 1 Kgs 19:16-21; 2 Kgs 2:1-10:27; 13:14-21. Such characters often come in pairs and Elisha is the fellow prophet and eventual successor of Elijah. Their stories — with significant differences — shape each other.

## What kind of writing is this?

The full story, all of chapter 5, is a narrative with plot, tensions and resolutions.

1-2 *Exposition*: characters and context established.

3 *Inciting moment*: the potential for a resolution

4-7 *Complication 1*: The quest seems over at the start; what will happen now?

8-13 *Complication 2*: The prophet proposes a test — a very simple one, too simple initially for the patient.

14 *Climax*: Naaman becomes a believer in YHWH.

15-19a *Dénouement 1*: The prophet

refuses any gift; on the contrary, Naaman makes requests, both reflecting his new faith and both granted.

19b-27 *Dénouement 2*: In contrast, the servant of the prophet fails to emulate the incorruptibility of his master; his punishment is the very leprosy of which Naaman had been cured.

In a word, the foreigner passes the test, while the servant of the prophet, in contrast, fails. Within the big biblical picture, the story as it now stands also serves as an example of conversion to YHWH.

## Old Testament Background

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." So he called her. When she came to him, he said, "Take your son." She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left. (2Kings 4:32-37)

## How does the Responsorial Psalm relate to this reading?

Psalm 96 (97) brings out the universality of God's grace: *The Lord has shown his salvation to the nations.*

## How does the first reading prepare for the Gospel?

There are strong features in common: leprosy (or whatever it was), a foreigner, an Israelite prophet, instant cure, gratitude.

## Brief Commentary

**Verses 14** Seven is the mystical number; the young boy reminds us of the young girl at the start of the story.

**Verse 15** A full conversion is made and with it the expression of

gratitude. Elisha seems to have had this conversion in mind from v. 8: Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel (2Kings 5:8). That is, a prophet who does not simply heals but acts on behalf of God. Naaman makes the first of three requests.

**Verse 16** Elisha resolutely refuses a gift.

**Verse 17** The second request makes Naaman sound like a tourist wishing to take home a souvenir. But, the land of Israel is holy and he wishes, even abroad, to be able to pray on the soil of the Holy land. It is important that this comes before v. 18.

**Verse 18** Naaman realises that his official position will involve indeed compromise and he asks for forgiveness in advance.

## Pointers for Prayer

1. The fortunate experience of Naaman leads to an evolution in this belief and to a conviction that there is only one universal God. Have I made any similar journey of faith in my own life?

2. Naaman faces a situation where some latitude will be necessary. Have I faced similar contexts and how did I negotiate the delicate balance between the ideal and the real?

## Prayer

Your will, O God is that all should be well and all should come to a knowledge of you. Help us to read the patterns of our lives and so come to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ your son.

We make our prayer through same Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

## Sunday Introductions

### First Reading

*2 Kings 5:14-17*

In our reading today, a good experience (being healed) leads to conversion and a new faith in God. The story is told, in part, to anticipate a similar story in the Gospel about a leper, a foreigner

also.

### Second Reading

*2 Timothy 2:8-13*

How did people before us pray? In today reading from an early letter, there is a short poetic passage — perhaps an early Christian hymn — with encouraging words.

### Gospel

*Luke 17:11-19*

All ten lepers are real outsiders and yet the foreigner (the Samaritan) is the one with insight and gratitude. It happens today too, even in the Church, that outsiders have greater insight than the insiders.

## Weekday Introductions

From Monday onwards, we have three weeks of Romans. It is, of course, a great early Christian document, but difficult. In my opinion, some kind of guiding introduction is essential if the people present (and the celebrant!) are to benefit from this challenging text.

Paul wrote to the house churches of Rome because they were in conflict over how much of Jewish tradition to retain. The Gentile Christians seemed to have looked down upon the Jewish Christians as still trapped in unnecessary practices. Conversely, the Jews looked down upon the Gentiles as ignoring essential aspects of the faith. Greatly simplified, Paul proceeds in four steps.

Step 1: Rom 1-4 *In these chapters, Paul makes it clear to Christian Gentiles and Christian Jews, that in terms of sin, there is no distinction — both are equally in need of grace and faith.*

Step 2: Rom 5-8 *Paul outlines in chronological sequence all that both Gentiles and Jews have received in Christ: salvation, faith, baptism, etc. In light of these great gifts, distinctions simply evaporate.*

Step 3: Rom 9-11 *In these great chapters, Paul discusses the tragedy of Israel's non-recognition of Jesus and the continued place of the Jews in God's plan. Not easy to read, but essential for Jewish-Christian relations today.*

Step 4: Rom 12-15 *Finally, the apostle gives his advice about how to live together*

*with differences.*

### Monday 14 October

*St Callistus, pope and martyr*  
*Romans 1:1-7*

Paul wrote to Christians in Rome because they were in conflict with each other over how much of Jewish tradition to keep. The opening passage is the usual greeting, but enriched with a careful account of the core convictions of the faith.

### Tuesday 15 October

*St Teresa*  
*Romans 1:16-25*

Paul is writing to Gentiles and Jews who have become Christians. He starts by reminding the Gentiles where they came from: idolatry and immorality. No doubt they felt uncomfortable being reminded of their past!

### Wednesday 16 October

*St Margaret Mary Alacoque*  
*Romans 2:1-11*

Yesterday, Paul outlined Gentile sin and perhaps led the Jews into judging. Now he turns on them, his co-religionists. The path for all is repentance.

### Thursday 17 October

*St Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr*  
*Romans 3:21-30*

Today we hear one of the most difficult passage in Paul. In a word: Jesus' own faithfulness discloses the faithfulness of God. I would recommend a better translation for these key verses: [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

### Friday 18 October

*St Luke, evangelist*  
*2 Timothy 4:10-17*

For the feast, we hear from 2 Tim, because it mentions a certain Luke. 2 Tim is probably not by Paul and Luke is probably not by Luke!

### Saturday 19 October

*Romans 4:13,16-18*

Great themes are brought together here: grace — the free gift — and faith — or faithfulness. Both Jews and Gentiles have equal access through faith to the free gift and therefore, *For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (Romans 3:22–24)