

At first glance this is no more than a simple story about the healing of some lepers. Jesus has done this before. So, why does the writer of Luke give us this story so close to Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and all the danger that lies in wait for him there?

Many Bible readers will be looking for a lesson to be learned from the thankful leper – some lesson that tells them how to act, that links their faith to healing. They will read this story linearly – Jesus – lepers – healing – thanksgiving.

But I want you to consider that this isn't a story intended to give believers one more set of rules for faithful behavior – but rather to help us let go of what we **think we know** in order to grasp a much larger picture of how God works, both then and now, in our ordinary, labor intensive world filled with hunger, disease, loss, hatred and a wide variety of hurting people.

This is a story about God – a 3 dimensional God. We need to allow the Spirit to quicken our imaginations while we let loose our pre-conceived notions of who God is and how God acts.

Because **we all impose our own expectations on God**; who God is, how God should act. We have some concept of what morals are acceptable to God, which habits faithful people should follow, whether God can be called 'mother', or how much repentance is necessary to salvation through Jesus.

We have our own picture of God – loving parent, stern judge, cosmic accountant, and we tend to set limits on who can receive God's mercy and healing, how God will bring about new tomorrows, even in what part of town God will be at work.

At this point in the gospel, Jesus is near Jerusalem and because Jesus' story is coming to an end, this story is bigger than a simple healing. It is a picture of salvation accomplished in the backwaters of this world, among the god forsaken people of this community. This one leper has discovered the treasure.

Luke tells us Jesus is standing in the region between Galilee and Samaria: a borderland where he is neither here nor there. Borders are meant to draw lines: lines between us and them, between safe and unsafe, between welcome and unwelcome. To stand in the borderland is to stand between what you've always known while being on the threshold of the future – where everything can change.

The borderland is far, far away from the center of the power which rules this world – so it's a place where anything can happen and where we hide the misshapen and embarrassing. It is both a place and a state of mind.

That is where we find Jesus today. At the border, among the lepers – whose only home is out here in the back of beyond. Here Jesus is bringing folk to healing again – a constant sign of his

kingdom. Ten lepers are told to go show themselves to the priest – AND ON THE WAY – they were healed. When ONE OF THE TEN sees his healed skin, he returns to glorify God, giving praise and thanks. In that moment, **as he worships the God who gave him life, he is made whole.** THIS IS what salvation looks like.

There is nothing wrong with the NINE, there is no fault to be found among them. There is simply something extraordinary about the ONE- the one who recognizes Jesus as the source of his healing, who has given him something for which to be thankful. This ONE CHANGES DIRECTION, turns toward Jesus and kneels.

This ONE leper doesn't simply thank his lucky stars - he doesn't thank SOME god SOMEWHERE in the universe. This anonymous one turns to thank THIS God, to claim this mercy received, to name this grace he's experienced, to glorify the God who is at work through this one called Jesus.

This ONE leper, living in the borderland between life and death, expecting nothing but more of the same, discovers God at work in Jesus, offering him a new tomorrow and when that happens he stops and gives glory to God. **What started as a chance encounter became a relationship between Jesus and this ONE,** and it is that relationship which makes the ONE whole.

Yes, his skin was healed – fresh like a young child. **Yes,** he could now rejoin his family and the community. But even more, **he had been made whole** – from a broken life came new life. New beginnings, new pathways, new futures. This healing was more than skin deep....it was a re-birth – and as such, it required praise, and thanksgiving and humility.... and in this we see the fulfillment of the kingdom of God before our eyes.

Right there, in the midst of the ordinary, is the kingdom – And these moments – these kingdom moments – these moments when forgiveness begins healing – when mercy births a new future – when grace sets someone freethese moments are blessings and deserve our thanksgiving and praise...they call on us to STOP, take notice, and point to God.

..but I expect we'll be surprised each time we witness one. Because you and I will be wandering down some back country road, or we'll have some chance encounter with a stranger, and God will slip into our presence, inviting us to know God and be healed...and we will know joy.

Not because we 'got it right', or because we predicted how God would act, but just because God has surprised us once again. Breaking open our closed hearts God helps us let go of it all – to become giddy with life while encountering the wonder of God.

Remember this: No one expected a crucified Messiah. No one expected the resurrection. Beyond all expectations, God loves us....even if it means traveling to the borderland to call us home.