

Sunday 12 October – Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

Sermon by Wendy Borgartz

There is no sermon from St. Luke's for the website this week, as it will be a talk about youth work. An audio recording of the talk from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](https://tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk). Instead the sermon from Messing is shown below.

On the way...

Our Gospel reading this morning begins with the phrase 'On the way to Jerusalem'. Luke is suggesting with this that the healing of the 10 lepers is almost incidental, Jesus is working a miracle that will completely change their lives while he is actually going somewhere else. We don't know what the 10 lepers are doing, whether they are also travelling or whether they are just sitting at the roadside, begging for help since they would have been totally excluded from the community. It is thought that the word we translate as leprosy was not leprosy as we know it today, but possibly a skin disease more like eczema or dermatitis, but it was considered to be a contagious disease in Bible times.

As Christians, we know that we always have Jesus alongside us, helping us and prompting us. But it is easy to forget that He is always there as we get overwhelmed with life as it is happening to us. Sometimes we don't actually recognize the action of Jesus in our lives at the time it happens. I am sure for the 10 lepers in the reading this morning that would not have been the case. Jesus's healing power would have totally changed their lives in almost an instant (at least once the priest had cleared them of leprosy), from being outcasts from society, unable to be with family and friends, forced to keep a distance from everyone – like social distancing during the pandemic but even more extreme than that.

Do we miss when Jesus is working in our lives at the time it happens and only realise it on reflection? I know that I have had that experience. When I left university in 1984 – a long time ago now – I went to work for the Audit Commission and trained to audit local authorities, and then NHS bodies too. The audit of local authorities had been a function existing in England

since the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, when the auditors went round auditing the workhouses to make sure the money was being spent properly. The person in charge in an area was called the District Auditor and in all those many years there had never been a female District Auditor, so when I started training my thought was ‘Wouldn’t it be good to be the first female District Auditor?’ Nothing like setting your sights high. Well, the first female District Auditor was someone else and was appointed in the early 1990s, but my career had progressed and several times I had bosses who put me forward for promotion to the role. We had to do an assessment centre to get through, which included several different tasks, one of which was always dealing with a difficult client– they used actors to play the part of the difficult client. Somehow, I could never succeed at this task, and my boss always said when the feedback came through: ‘Why can’t you handle the difficult client? I know you can do it, I have seen you doing it in real life!’ The last time I tried for the new role, it was a difficult staff situation instead, I knew what the answers were & how to handle it but I found words coming out of my mouth that I knew were wrong. It was as if my mouth was disconnected from my brain and my brain was going ‘what are you on about you silly woman, that’s not what you should be saying.’ It was a strange feeling. With the benefit of hindsight, I can look back now and see that God was stopping me from making a mistake. When the Audit Commission was closed and the staff transferred to the private sector, if I had made it to District Auditor my experience would have been far worse, and it would have been far harder to find a different job. If I hadn’t found that different job, which was less stressful and intense, I would never have had the time to train as an LLM and I would not be standing here today.

We may feel shock at the 9 lepers who were healed who didn’t come back to say thank you to Jesus. We are brought up to say thank you. Clearly, they were so overwhelmed by what had happened and what it meant for their lives, that they could go back to be with their families, they could be part of society again, that they were overtaken by that and didn’t take the time to turn back to Jesus. One person did, the Samaritan, the foreigner. We don’t know who the other nine were, they could have been foreigners too, we just don’t know. But the person who did say thank you would have been the person the Jewish people would have least expected to behave well, he was one of the despised and hated Samaritans, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan the person not expected to do the right thing. Maybe we

have, like me, missed recognizing Jesus and what He is doing for us or in our lives when it happens? Maybe we only realize later what has happened and can thank Jesus later in our lives, once realization dawns on us. Sometimes we just don't see God's hand at work at the time something happens.

In our reading from the Old Testament, Namaan the big important army commander was also suffering from leprosy. The suggestion of a young female slave, someone very unimportant in society, sowed the seed with Namaan that he should seek healing from the prophet Elisha because Elisha had God's power with him. Then Namaan gets very uptight because Elisha doesn't even come out to meet him and tells him to go and bathe in the nearby river. Elisha shows no respect for Namaan's social standing and why would you believe that you could be healed just by bathing in a river? As Namaan's entourage tell him, it is not something difficult to do, he can easily go and bathe in the river, so he does it, you can almost feel the grumpiness coming off him, and lo and behold he is healed, just like that.

I wonder if we sometimes expect that God will ask us to do difficult things? Are we looking too hard for the fancy, complicated, difficult solutions and we overlook the obvious that God is pointing out to us and we miss it completely? Do we focus too much on the hard, difficult side of life, are we too busy being busy, that we miss the joy in the small things, like the sun coming out or the beauty around us in the world? Do we see the glass half empty rather than the glass half full? And we need to never forget that if God does ask us to do something that we find hard, He will always give us the wherewithal to complete it.

Recognising Jesus as he meets us along the way is sometimes easy, but often not something we realise until later. I pray that we will each have our own encounters with Jesus and come to recognise God's hand at work in our lives.

Amen