WHERE ARE THE NINE?

Luke 17:12–19

My life had changed, suddenly everything had gone wrong and I didn't know why. Leprosy had become evident on my skin. People around me assumed it was somehow a punishment from God, and I was told to leave my home. I had always been faithful, but that was the law, whether Samaritan or Jew, the stigma was the same.

I knew my family still loved me, but this was a terrible trial for us all. The expectation of healing was low, and my priest was clear that this physical separation would last until he could ratify any healing. He did not look confident. His sympathy was but empty words of kindness.

I ended up in a leper village between Galilee and Jerusalem. Ten of us formed a friendship. We often went walking, but always on the alert to keep away from others, ringing our wretched bells as necessary, staying close together. Although I was a Samaritan among Jews, they took no notice, - I was one of them, - diseased, leprous, cast out. I had lost my faith, and with that all hope.

One of the local priests would occasionally come by and shout out family news for those they knew. Last time he came he told us about this Jesus of Nazareth. He wasn't sure about him, but this man was certainly making a name for himself. Some called him The Messiah! In fact he was healing people and expecting his disciples to do the same. What! He had even healed leprosy! We ten were together when the priest said this. We looked at each other, and all thought the same thing: "I wish!", but then the better question: "How? Where is he? Can we ever get to him?"

"He's on his way to Jerusalem with his disciples."

How do you explain how one's thought can shift so quickly? From nowhere I suddenly felt a divine impulsion, - my own emptiness suddenly sparked up with a deep deep prayer, Oh Father, - please, please, let this be true, guide us to this man Jesus, guide me once again to You!

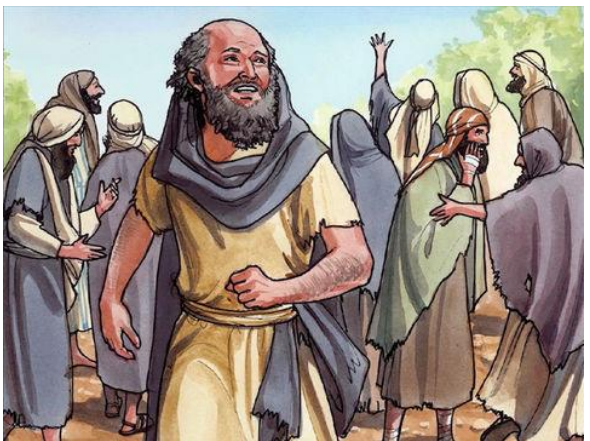
My friends were quick to consult, - it took just seconds! We got together and headed straightaway for the nearest village on the road to Jerusalem! Our bells were as impatient as we were. We all felt it was worth the gamble, - would we meet up with this Jesus? What were the chances? But I felt a different emotion, - a yearning within me to reach out once more. I had left God, but He had never left me. I felt Love's guidance. I suddenly realised I was at last listening again. I knew God was guiding me and we would indeed meet with Jesus. I was seeking regeneration, my dear friends seemed to be just after their healing.



And it was not long before we all saw a procession ahead of us. This must be Jesus and his followers. We increased our pace, bells ringing. We were heard, and they turned to see.

We shouted out as one and with reverence: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

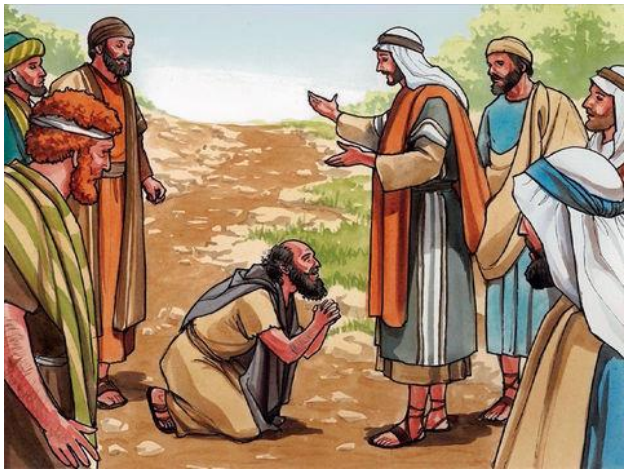
"Go shew yourselves unto the priests."



That's all he said! A simple command. But what wealth within! The confident expectancy of healing, the dismissal of the claim of leprosy, no need for interrogation – just a simple statement from those many yards away embracing all ten of us. It seemed no big deal for him, - but it was for us!! We obeyed and began to walk back the way we had come. Right before our eyes the leprosy just disappeared! What joy! My friends were staring at their

flesh, now new-born and clear, - all those years of fear and pain and stigma eradicated in moments. We were free!!

Yet I didn't need to look. I just knew. I had felt the power of God running through me. So many thoughts going through my mind! My friends were marching off in glee. I called after them, but they were not listening anymore, they kept pointing at their bodies. And here I was, spiritually renewed! I felt refreshed, that God had guided me here for this very reason, - to stand whole and free, to rejoice! That simple command of confidence was all it took, and we believed! I believed! I turned back, saw Jesus and his followers all watching. I jumped in the air, shouted "YES!", skipped and ran to where Jesus was standing, and knelt before him with overflowing gratitude and new-found humility. My leprous mortal past not even a memory, but the joy of recognition filling my heart and soul.



Jesus spoke: "**Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."**

He knew I was a Samaritan! It hadn't mattered! His outreach and love were unconditional! I felt once more the love he had shown us, I felt the embrace of his followers as they now included me in their joy. I saw man as God's beloved, whole and free, and Jesus had been there for me, was there for all of us.

He continued speaking: "**Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."**

I stood up. The love in his face shone and I felt its radiance. His love had made me aware of my true nature, - far beyond the flesh, - the glory of God reflected in man.

A day later, my priest confirmed what I knew. I was free.

I went to my family. We embraced, and the love we felt was as never before.

"Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Revelation 7: 12 *Blessing*

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