



Jesus said, "...Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

LUKE 17:17–19

They Were Cleansed

The men in today's passages were considered outside the realm of God's concern. First, they were foreigners. Naaman was from Syria, a frequent enemy of ancient Israel. The man in the Gospel passage was a Samaritan, a descendant of marriage between Israelites and foreign people who were exiled to northern Israel around 722 BC. These men were outsiders, distrusted, even despised because they were not Israelites who believed that only they were "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6).

Besides their foreign affiliation, these men suffered from the dreaded disease of leprosy. Their affliction might not have been the disease we know by that name today, but perhaps a skin condition such as psoriasis or eczema. Whatever the case, Israel held that any form of skin flare-up rendered the sufferer unclean or unfit to participate in public ritual. Furthermore, contact with lepers threatened the religious status of others.

It was for religious, more than hygienic reasons that lepers were shunned.

It appears that God is not inhibited by human customs, even religious customs. Both men are healed of their ailment, one by the prophet Elisha the other by Jesus. This itself would make both stories remarkable. But there is more: Both returned to express their profound gratitude to the agent of God through whom they had been healed. Naaman was willing to transfer his religious allegiance to the God of Israel; the Samaritan fell at the knees of Jesus, a hated Jew. Surely, God works in mysterious ways.

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FOR *Reflection*

- ✦ *Think of someone who belongs to a different religious tradition. Reflect on how God appears to have blessed them.*
- ✦ *Pray for all countries that today are suffering from poverty or war.*