

The Lepers



Luke 17:11-19

Year C Proper 23

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3
▲	Simon - a natural leader and organizer, the only one who truly believes Jesus can heal them	▲	▲	
▲	Marcus - a skeptic who has come to terms with his disease	▲	▲	▲
▲	Jacob - the most desperate and fearful member of the group	●	▲	
▲	Isaiah - the angriest leper at the misfortune that has struck them	▲	▲	
▲	Cornelius - a Samaritan leper looked down on even by the other lepers	▲	●	▲
▲	Matthias - the most religious of the lepers	▲	▲	

Scene 1

Cornelius , Isaiah , Jacob , Marcus , Matthias , Simon

{Ten lepers wait by the side of a road.}

Simon There he is! He's coming! Everybody get ready.

Marcus *[incredulously]* Are we really going do this?

Jacob *[desperately]* Of course! What other choice do we have?

Marcus *[gently]* We can choose to accept our fate with dignity. Otherwise, we're going to spend the rest of our days chasing an endless succession of quack healers and miracle cures.

Isaiah *[angrily]* Are you married? Do you have children? I'll never see my family again, but before I disappear from civilized society, I'm going to have my say, and this Jesus guy is going to be the one to hear it!

Jacob *[terrified]* No! You can't! You'll get him mad at us, and he's our only chance!

Simon *[firmly]* Calm down, both of you! Isaiah isn't going to say anything provocative until we've had a chance to plead our case. *[to Isaiah]* Isn't that right?

Isaiah Yeah, yeah. You can go do your begging first. I'll wait until nothing comes of it before getting my two bits in.

Simon That's all I ask.

Marcus You really believe he's going to heal us, don't you?

Simon I know he is. I saw him raise a dead boy back to life!

Cornelius We've heard you tell the story before, but can I ask you something about it?

Matthias *[harshly]* You shouldn't even be here!

Cornelius *[indignantly]* I worship the God of our fathers just like you!

Matthias You are a heretic!

Simon *[ever the good organizer]* Hold on, hold on! Matthias, you know we voted on this. So unless anyone's had a change of heart and wants a re-vote...? *[looks around and finds no takers]* Okay, then that's still the decision of the group. Cornelius, what was your question?

Cornelius How could you be sure that this Jesus raised the boy from the dead? Couldn't the people have made a mistake, and the boy was really just in a coma or something and then came out of it just at that moment?

Isaiah For that matter, what if the whole thing was staged?

Simon Staged? By who?

Isaiah By anybody! Your "messiah." The leaders of that village. Anybody who thought they could build up their own power by faking a miracle.

Matthias *[contemptuously]* So says the unbeliever.

Marcus *[in genuine curiosity]* So you believe that Jesus raised the boy - and has the power to heal us?

Matthias You think that's the only question we need an answer to?

Simon What other questions do you think we need to ask?

Matthias Where the power comes from, for one thing. I won't risk my soul to save my body! And even if the power *is* from God, we should ask ourselves if he'll even be willing to heal us.

Marcus Okay, I'll bite: why wouldn't God want to heal us?

Matthias I guess there's no room in your enlightened philosophy for the idea of punishment. Maybe we're sick because we deserve to be. Or maybe he'll refuse us because of the unbelievers and heretics among us. *[to Marcus]* Isn't that why you voted with me against Cornelius? You were afraid of the same thing, only you were too "dignified" to admit it!

Jacob *[blurtng it out in sudden anxiety]* I want to change my vote! *[to Simon]* You said we could!

Simon All right, but why? The more we have, the better our chances will be, no matter who makes up our number.

Matthias What's the matter? Have you suddenly lost faith in democracy now that you see the vote is going to against you?

Marcus *[after a pause]* I think you should call for the re-vote.

Simon *[sighing with resignation]* Very well. How do you vote on whether Cornelius can stay with us?

Jacob No!

Isaiah Yes.

Matthias No.

Marcus *[after a pause]* Yes!

everybody *[everybody ad libs surprise at Marcus' changed vote. (e.g. What? You changed your vote! etc.)]*

Simon *[suddenly happy again]* And I vote Yes! Cornelius remains in the group.

Cornelius *[to Marcus]* Why?

Marcus It was nothing personal the first time. I was essentially voting against the idea of *any* of us going to the healer.

Cornelius And this time?

Marcus You should be allowed to choose for yourself.

Cornelius Thanks. *[to everybody]* I choose to stay.

Jacob He's coming! He's coming!

Simon All right everybody, just like we planned it!

everybody Rabbi! Have mercy on us!

Scene 2

Cornelius , Isaiah , Jacob , Marcus , Matthias , Simon

{Jesus' only response was to tell them to go present themselves to the priests, and so now the lepers are on the road back to the city.}

Isaiah *[angrily]* Why wouldn't you let me tell him off?

Simon Because he's going to heal us! He said he would. This is just part of the process.

Isaiah What this is is the old run-around! He sends us to the priests, they send us to the doctors, and by the time the doctors send us away, he'll be long gone! It would have been better if he had just said right out, "No I can't heal you!"

Jacob That can't be it! It can't! It's not like he took any money from us, right? So why would he even need to give us the run-around?

Marcus Maybe to preserve his own illusions. Maybe he's not a deliberate fraud. Maybe he really believes he can perform miracles. Now he can imagine that we get healed when we're far away from him, too far for him to ever find out it didn't really happen.

Isaiah Well, I'm going back to deliver the news to him right now. I don't know what I was doing coming along with you to see the priests anyway!

Jacob Wait, you have to stay! He said for all of us to go the priests. What if we *all* have to do it or none of us will be healed? What if this is a test of our faith?

Simon Whatever we do, we should do it together. We should put it to another vote.

Isaiah I vote we quit this farce and go back and find that guy and take our misery out on his hide!

Jacob To the priests! To the priests!

Cornelius I wasn't sure how this healer would feel about me being a Samaritan, but I'm positive how the priests will feel. I vote No.

Marcus *[to Matthias]* You go ahead. I'm still thinking about it.

Matthias *[hesitantly]* I vote for the priests.

Simon Really? Then you believe Jesus had the power - and it was of God?

Matthias *[more thoughtfully than he's spoken in the past]* I don't know what to think. He wasn't what I expected. He...he...*[tails off into nothing]* But here's why I'm voting Yes: Often in the Law, when someone becomes temporarily unclean for whatever reason, the thing they're supposed to do as soon as they're clean again is...go present themselves to the priests.

Jacob That's exactly what he said, wasn't it? Not just "go to the priests" but "go *present* yourselves to the priests!"

Simon I was obviously going to vote Yes anyway, but this clinches it. Marcus, you have the final vote.

Marcus I'm sorry, but I've got to vote No. We're letting wild, magical hopes get the best of us again. I've walked as far as I care to along this road.

Simon It's a tie.

{Everybody gets very heated and talks very fast next, interrupting one another and talking at the same time, until they are all interrupted by a bright light that shines down upon them.}

Isaiah Which means we do nothing!

Jacob Are you crazy? We have to try! We have to -

Cornelius There's no law we have to try together! I for one -

{Marcus, Matthias, and Simon speak simultaneously.}

Marcus *[simultaneously with the other two]* You know, I'm getting really tired of this. I think I'm just going to -

Matthias *[simultaneously with the other two]* God's law is the only law that matters, and it may be that -

Simon *[simultaneously with the other two]* Please, please! We have to do this in an orderly -

{The bright light hits them.}

everybody Ah!!!!

Simon What was that?

Jacob I'm blinded! I'm blinded!

Marcus No, no. Our eyes are just dazzled. Give it a minute.

Cornelius You're right. I can see you now. I can - Oh my God, you're healed!

Marcus What?

Isaiah He's right! You're healed. And he is, too! And...and so am I!

Matthias We all are! How did he do it? Who is he? What is he?

Simon I think it's obvious. And I think it's obvious what we need to do next.

Jacob *[fearfully]* What? Do we have to do something else?

Marcus I think he means go back.

Simon That's right. We should go back and find Jesus. At the very least to thank him, but maybe even to join him. If he really is the Messiah.

Matthias I'm not so sure yet. Power can come from Heaven or Hell, as I said. I'm going on to the priests. They'll be able to tell me which.

{Matthias exits.}

Simon All right. I suppose we don't all have to go. What about the rest of you? Who'll come with me?

Isaiah Two minutes ago, I was basically a dead man, and now I'm alive. I'm going straight to my family, and God help the soul who gets in my way!

{Isaiah exits.}

Marcus Sorry, but I'm going to go, too. Maybe it was Jesus who healed us, and maybe not. I won't take the chance that we'll be playing into some madman's delusion.

{Marcus exits.}

Simon *[to Jacob]* Surely, *you'll* come.

Jacob I'm not going anywhere! I'm healed now, and I'm not going to take any chances! Maybe this Jesus will strike me with leprosy again if I get too close to him. Maybe the priests will tell me this is Satan's doing. I'm not letting any of that happen!

{Jacob exits.}

Cornelius If it's any consolation, I'll come.

Simon *[suddenly petulant]* Great! *[calling out to the departing lepers]* Where do you think you're going? I saved you! If it wasn't for me, you'd all still be sick! And I had to do it despite all your doubts and stubbornness and petty bickering! Aren't you going to at least thank *me*??? Fine! Run away and leave me with this dirty Samaritan!

Cornelius *[offended]* Hey!

Simon I'm going home, too!

{Simon exits.}

Scene 3

Cornelius , Marcus

{Two years later, Cornelius runs into Marcus in the streets of Jerusalem.}

Cornelius Marcus!

Marcus Oh my God, it's you! Cornelius! You're looking well!

Cornelius *[in quiet amazement]* So are you! I can't believe it. Your leprosy didn't come back?

Marcus No, why should it? Did yours?

Cornelius No, but...it's a long story. Have you heard from any of the others? Are they all still well?

Marcus I kept in touch with a few of them for a while, and nobody got sick again as far as I know.

Cornelius *[half to himself]* I don't get it...

Marcus Were you expecting us to get sick again? Why?

Cornelius I went back to Jesus, to thank him. I was the only one. And I found him. I found him and thanked him, and he made a remark about how I was the only one to return and then told me - these were his exact words - "Your faith has made you well."

Marcus "Has made you well?" Not "Your faith *made* you well?"

Cornelius Exactly! As if I was healed right then and there and not earlier on the road, and only because I was the one who returned to thank him. Then I began worrying about the rest of you. What if your leprosy returned? What if you had to go back and thank him for the cure to stick? I ran right back to search for you, but you had all gone off on your separate ways, and when I tried to return to Jesus, I couldn't find him either.

Marcus I'm sorry you worried about us, but why did you go back to Jesus?

Cornelius To join him. He was obviously the Messiah, just like Simon claimed. But I couldn't find him, and still haven't been able to, though I've continued to look for the past two years.

Marcus *[sadly]* Well, you can stop searching now.

Cornelius What, do you know where he is? Is he here in Jerusalem?

Marcus In a manner of speaking. He came here over a year ago, not too long after we met him, and quickly got himself arrested. And executed.

Cornelius Executed? Him?

Marcus So you see? He wasn't the Messiah, after all.

Cornelius I was so sure. And he healed us. Didn't he?

Marcus Maybe he did and maybe he didn't. He might have had the power to heal, but he had no power over the Romans.

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at www.WineskinProject.net/blog/lepers

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