“AND THEN THERE WAS ONE”

October 12, 2025 Luke 17:11-19

In 1974, the Stonehenge Bowling Alley opened for business in Akron, Ohio. It was innovative for its time. For one thing, the place was huge. There are 48 bowling lanes, a game room, pool table area, food, and party rooms. To top it off, Stonehenge was the first bowling alley in the area to have electronic scoring. A group would type their names in the keyboard, which would appear on a large screen above your lane. This meant everyone could see how good or not so good you were doing. You push start and begin to bowl. The system would automatically count the number of pins knocked down and add up your score. It wasn’t perfect, but it what a leap forward in automation.

Of course, all this computerization didn’t make anyone a better bowler. And if you have ever bowled you know there are some good rounds and not so good rounds. To receive the most points in bowling you want to knock all 10 pins down with your first ball roll. Stringing these strikes in a row is the ultimate goal of bowling. To make a strike one needed place the ball between the front pin and the one next to it. This would create a domino effect that would mix the pins and knock them all down.

There were times when getting strikes seemed so easy, and there were other times when I couldn’t buy a strike to save my life. Bowling was especially frustrating when I consistently hit the head pin and nine

pins would fall down except for one, one lone untouched standing in the corner pin. I would have to throw a second ball hoping to get a spare. If one did this throughout the game you would receive a score around 190, a good score to be sure, but you would never break the 200 ceiling.

Obviously, the Gospel lesson this morning is not about bowling, but it is about one who remained while the other 9 went missing. More precisely, it is about one who returned to give thanks. Now it would be easy to turn this story into a lesson on gratitude. There are certainly elements of thanksgiving to be found. But there is more to the story than a thank you note to Jesus. It is a tale about healing and seeing.

Luke tells us that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, meaning he was on his way to the Passover celebration, and more importantly to the Cross. He and his disciples were coming from the North and traveled South through the territories of Galilee and Samaria. These locations are important because Samaria is a territory most orthodox Jews would avoid.

As Jesus enters a village, he hears 10 men with a skin disease calling out to him. What type of skin disease they had we are not told. How they knew it was Jesus, again missing information. We aren't even told their names. But notice, Luke writes, "Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, '**Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!**"

I. A BIGGER COMMUNITY

My wife and I owned a suburban home in Cleveland. That home had several tall pin oak trees in the backyard, which produced a lot of acorns and leaves. One summer there was a strong storm that went through the

neighborhood. One of the large branches broke off a tree a hit our roof. We heard the boom! Fortunately, the branch landed horizontal instead of vertical, so we did not sustain any damage to the roof and gutter.

After the storm subsided, I went up on the roof to inspect the situation. The size of the branch and the house wires below prohibited me from just rolling the branch off the roof. As I was contemplating the situation a man with a chainsaw saw me, climbed up on the roof, and began to cut the branch in pieces as I lift them and threw them over the side. I discovered the man lived around the corner, a few houses down. We had never met before, but he saw a need around the neighborhood and decided to help people out.

That's what crisis and need do. They bring people together. Like AA, it doesn't matter age, gender, status, nationality, - they are there to stay sober. Their common need outweighed society barriers. Luke tells us these 10 men were Keeping their distance which was a requirement of the Jewish Law. It was the best way to keep a disease from spreading, especially if this was leprosy. This also means these men were shunned by the rest of the community. They couldn't go to market, they couldn't gather with their family, they couldn't conduct business as usual, and they could never enter the synagogue. They were dependent of the mercy of others. They were outsiders, so they formed their own community.

On top of this situation, we are informed that one of them was a Samaritan, someone who wouldn't ordinarily be included in a group of Jews. But their common need trumped the cultural barrier. O, if only this

world would operate this way. The power of the gospel is it reminds us that we all have a common affliction and need, it is called sin, and we need God. That alone should be enough to bridge most of our barriers and bind us together. The church is to be a community of outsiders that have been brought together by need and the grace of God. If we would only live into the vision, what a different world would be created.

II. JOY IN OUR FAITH

One day the boss called one of his employees into his office. "**Rob**," he said, "you've been with the company for a year now. You started off in the mailroom, one week later you were promoted to a sales position, one month after that you were promoted to district manager of the sales department, and just four short months later, you were promoted to vice-chairman. Now it's time for me to retire, and I want you to take over the company. What do you have to say to that?"

"**Thanks**," said the unenthusiastic employee. "Thanks?" the boss replied. "Thanks?! Is that all you can say?"

"**Okay, okay,"** the employee said. "**Thanks, Dad**."

I realize that peoples' personalities vary greatly. Some people tend to be more Eeyore-ish and some are more Pollyanna. Some folks get excited over the smallest of events and others would barely crack a smile at the birth of a child. We all react differently. However, if you were deathly ill and all of a sudden were made well, how would you feel? Wouldn't you want to dance and sing for joy? At the very least you would be pretty happy and excited.

The reaction of our Samaritan isn't all that surprising. "**Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus's feet and thanked him.**" The man was excited, he was happy, he was filled with gratitude and joy, so much so, that he couldn't keep it inside. The man had to express himself and what better way than to run back and thank Jesus.

Is there joy in our faith? Are we excited about what God is doing in our lives and through our fellowship? Do we sing our hymns with enthusiasm or dull praise? How do we react when asked to do a job at church, with excuses, begrudgingly, or with gratitude that we can serve? Do we come at our religious practices like they are some great burden to bear, or as opportunities to better understand our faith and draw closer to God? Who wants to participate with any group that is full of lifeless, grumpy people?

I realize not everything about our faith is a party. In fact, following Jesus is quite challenging at times. But either we have the best news in the world, or we don't. Either we have found great meaning and purpose or it's somewhere else. Either we have encountered the living God, or we are living in fantasy. Either we have experienced healing of the soul, or something is missing. If we have shared in any of these faith moments, if God has done any good in our lives, then there ought to be joy in our hearts. And if there is joy then we were created to express it. A joyless Christian is a misnomer. Where is our praise? Then again, perhaps we are seeing things wrong.

III. AND HE SAW

Liz Cooledge Jenkins, in an article called, "**What Does It Mean to Say 'We Believe'**?" wrote, "I've found it helpful to learn that not all faith communities put the same sort of emphasis on doctrine and so-called "**orthodoxy**" as Western Christianity often has. Trying to get everyone to believe the same thing is a particular type of exercise of authority. Faith communities do not have to be this way. I think it's good to know that a Western emphasis on particular beliefs is not the only way of **seeing things**.

I like the idea of spirituality, faith, or religion being passed along from one person to another not by someone telling someone else what to believe, but instead by "**observation and participation**." We share spiritual practices together. We participate in rituals that help us connect with God, care for one another, and understand who we are in this world.

Sure, there are beliefs that lie behind these practices. But being able and willing to regurgitate specific doctrines with precision is not the point. **Seeking God together through shared spiritual practice is.**

Twice in this passage Luke uses the words, "**When he saw**," These words are attributed once to Jesus and once to the Samaritan. Here's what's interesting. After these words are spoken they are followed by an action which resulted in healing. But first someone had to see. They had to see something more going on. They had to see God at work and respond to it.

Jesus criticizes the 9 that didn't return not because they did something wrong. In fact, they were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do. Go to the priest, the one who would declare them clean and let them back into society. They had received healing. They got what they desired. I am sure they were grateful on some level. So what's the problem? They missed the bigger picture.

This one man saw something more than his healing. He saw the Son of God, and he wanted to give something back. Jesus said, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Actually, that is a bad translation. What Jesus said was, **"…your faith has saved you.**"

Remember Jesus is building his Kingdom not just playing doctor. This is not to belittle the healing ministry of Jesus. Rather, I believe Jesus wants the healing to go deeper not just skin deep, but soul deep. This one man, this outsider, alone realizes something greater is at work here than his skin healing. He turns to see the one behind the healing and gives himself to Christ and is saved. He saw what the other 9 missed. This outsider challenges us to see beyond ourselves and our little worlds that we might encounter the one who is behind all good things. When we see we can't possibly sit still. We must act and serve and praise, even if we are the only pin left standing. There we will discover our salvation.

Author Philip Yancey once wrote, "**When I go to church, I have learned to look up, look around, look outward, and look inward. This new way of seeing has helped me to stop merely tolerating the church and instead learn to love it.**" Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley
Sunday, October 12, 2025
Second Scripture Lesson

Luke 17:11-19

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region
between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease
approached him. Keeping their distance,

13 they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

14 When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves
to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.

15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned
back, praising God with a loud voice.

16 He prostrated himself at Jesus’s feet and thanked him. And he
was a Samaritan.

17 Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are
the other nine?

18 Did none of them return to give glory to God except this
foreigner?”

19 Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith
has made you well.”

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be To God.