

# Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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## Introduction

For the last three months we have been following Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem through an emotional landscape marked by increasing tensions and difficulties. The journey has been punctuated by episodes of controversy and conflict, hard sayings and perplexing parables and, as is a regular feature of Luke's gospel, encounters with a variety of interesting characters. Today's passage – which comes near to the end of the journey section of Luke's narrative (9:51–19:29) brings us another encounter story – one which draws us into the particular and personal quest of a small group of people. The ensuing narrative – and the way Luke tells it – provide us with some pointers we can use in our thinking about conflict.

**Preparation:** Reread the journey narrative from the time Jesus sets out in Luke 9:51 and ending with today's passage. What stands out to you? Are there particular themes or patterns which you can see emerging?

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## Text

### Luke 17:11–19

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

As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance,

they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

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

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

He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

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

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## Comment

As we have noted before, the gospels are not simple chronological records of Jesus' actions and words. Rather they are carefully crafted pieces of writing in which the authors use different literary forms to catch and direct the attention of their readers towards truths about Jesus and the Kingdom.

Today's passage is a pronouncement story – but one of a longer and more complex type involving a quest. Pronouncement stories are common in the gospels and are generally brief narratives which culminate in a pronouncement made by Jesus in response to the specific stimulus of something which has been said or done. In the case of quest stories, this response is part of a story in which someone is in pursuit of something which is crucial to their wellbeing – healing, exorcism, forgiveness, acceptance, enlightenment etc. The role of the quester, their specific needs and the movement from seeking to finding (or not finding) provide the dynamics and the shape of the story, generating the tensions which draw the hearer or the reader into the action and engaging their sympathy or empathy. These particular stories generally end with a comment by Jesus either directly to, or about, the person who is searching (sometimes with an added contrast to the actions of another party) which add additional dimensions to the story.

The social status of those on the quest is often a significant factor – Gentiles, lepers, tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes and criminals all feature and thus carry with them characteristics which seem to disqualify them, in various ways, from being of importance. These characteristics may generate objections from bystanders (e.g. Luke 7: 39) or obstacles which must be overcome (e.g. Lk 17: 12; Matt 19:22;) The response of Jesus and the outcome of the quest are thus used by the gospel writers as a way of exposing and reversing negative social judgements and harmful prejudices; or to underline, reinforce or disrupt received wisdom or perspectives.

Today's passage is one of several quest stories told by Luke (for others see 7: 1–10; 7: 36–50; 19: 1–10; 23: 39–43) and happens while Jesus is travelling through border territory on his way to Jerusalem. He encounters ten people with a condition which seriously affects their physical and social wellbeing. Luke underlines this with supreme economy in v.12 – though the impact is somewhat diminished by the NRSV's translation. Here *Porr then* is rendered as 'keeping their distance' but the Greek actually has a much stronger feel with the root word *porr* meaning 'a great way off'. The healing takes place relatively early and in a very low key way and thus the main attention is directed towards what happens subsequently.

Here we encounter the second point of difficulty in the story – namely that at least one of those healed (we know nothing about the other nine) is a Samaritan. Luke has already indicated – right at the start of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem – the attitude which at least some of the disciples (and perhaps many of his early

hearers) had towards the Samaritans: 'do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' ask James and John when they are not welcomed at a Samaritan village along the way (Lk 9:54). Luke further heightens the tension in v18 where Jesus refers to the leper who returns as a 'this foreigner' (*allogen s: allos* – another, *genos* – a race). Yet it is this person, this Samaritan, who recognises something beyond the obvious healing in what has happened and responds in a way which overturns the expectations of those witnessing the event.

The contrast Jesus' draws in v 17–18 reinforces the point and his concluding comment also suggests that the nature of the man's journey has changed because of the encounter. *Poreu* – here translated 'go on your way' – suggests a purposeful journey and contrasts with the feel of *hypag* (withdrawing, melting away) – *as they went* – in v.14. The same word is used of Mary as she sets out to visit Elizabeth in Lk 1:39, and of Jesus as he sets his face to go to Jerusalem in 9:51 – both pursuing a definite, distinctive and definitive course in response to the divine imperative

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## Response

You are invited to consider some or all of the following questions with respect to a conflict in which you are, or have been, involved.

– Can you identify things or perceptions about any people involved in this situation (including yourself) which are being used to create obstacles or barriers to progress or resolution? If so, what are they, how are they operating, and what needs to be done to address this?

– Think about things which people might be doing or saying in response to specific elements of this conflict. Are they pointing towards something other than what they seem? What underlying narratives, wisdoms or attitudes might they be trying to expose or challenge? Is there anything you need to consider or reevaluate in response?

– Are there things which you need to look or ask for in order to make progress in understanding or resolving this conflict – and if so, what are they and how might you go about this? Who might be able to help you?

– Have there been changes in dynamics, narratives or behaviour which might contain deeper insights than appear at first sight? If so, how can you explore and learn from these?

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## Prayer

Jesus,  
Help us  
to recognise and change  
those attitudes and assumptions  
we harbour or endorse  
which prevent others and ourselves  
from developing  
richer and broader understandings.

Help us  
to recognise and attend to  
those barriers and stereotypes  
we raise or endorse  
which prevent others and ourselves  
from moving forward  
into better and more expansive practices;

And help us  
to recognise and celebrate  
those changes of understanding and practice  
which help us on our journeys  
towards peace, flourishing,  
and the greater life of your Kingdom.  
Amen

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### Further Reading

For more on quest stories see: Robert C. Tannehill, *The Shape of the Gospel: New Testament Essays* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007) pp 75–83; 105–106