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*“Speak, O Lord, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of our lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, Lord. Your servants are listening.”*

Jesus is on His way to face the Cross. As He enters a village ten lepers approach Him, and mindful of the rules of their society, mindful of their need to avoid contaminating anyone, and mindful too of the fear that others had of them, they call out to Jesus from a distance, *“Jesus, Master. Have mercy on us.”*

A plaintive cry. With what sense of futility. What desperate hope. They call out. Jesus does something in a most unusual manner. St Francis did something, repulsed, dropped the outcast a coin. The outcast did something, made Francis see Jesus. The ten outcasts were healed by Jesus, made whole. One outcast returned, praising God and giving thanks. Francis was healed, and made whole, came back to Jesus, and went down to work mercy upon them. Relationships make one whole and alive again, to Jesus, to all others, to all creation.

Years ago, I came in contact with an Episcopal priest, Robert Farrar Capon. His theology emphasized radical grace and love of God as the foundation of the Christian faith. The Church should not be transactional but relational. Unconditional love. In his book “Parables of Grace,” he urges us to think about it this way:

The ten lepers are all dead people--physically, spiritually, socially--dead. They would love to get healed which, in this context, means they would love to get raised from the dead, and return back home to a “normal life.”

That’s all that they, like most people, ever really asked for. Just a chance to “be like other people,” an opportunity to be go back home like everyone else, to be normal. They assume that this is what Jesus is all about--a return to the normal, a revival of the ordinary for people who, because of their infirmity and illness, are abnormal and sub-ordinary.

But one of the healed lepers, a Samaritan, realizes a real resurrection. He alone comes back to say “thanks.” He realizes that his healing comes from God--through Jesus--and that God has put him in a relationship to Jesus, and that relationship alone has made him whole and alive again…. He comes back not only cured, but saved, made whole. He comes back saved, because he alone saw that his healing, his resurrection, for what it was.

He was saved and accepted by Jesus while he was an outcast, while he was still sick, while he was untouchable, before he got well. He realized that Jesus didn’t just want to heal people, much less make them normal. Jesus wanted to, and has the power to, raise them up, today. Nine was healed. One got saved.

Nine went away unsaved because all they really wanted was a normal life, a life like that they have dreamed of, a life that which they had before they became outcasts, a life like everyone else’s. But one was not in a hurry to forget how bad it was, he’s not in a hurry to get a normal life. He realizes something important. He realizes that the hand of God has touched his life, that Jesus has accepted him as He accepted the other nine.

It did not matter to Jesus that they were outcasts, that they were dead in their sins. One realizes this--a Samaritan--a despised outcast, who realize how unusual, how out of the ordinary, how exceptional this is. And he gives thanks to God--to Jesus--for this. His acknowledgement of this event, his thanksgiving, is called faith by Jesus. A faith that saves.

As so often, St Luke’s Gospel compels us to confront the human tendency to categorize and place labels on people. Here one who is doubly marginal--by reason of illness, by reason of his ethnic background--shows himself more disposed to really know God, and so experience salvation. This event is not just about the healing of the afflicted. It’s about faith. A faith that leads to conversion. A faith that brings salvation.