

## Your Faith Has Made You Well

Luke 17:11-19

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Most good stories have a memorable punch line at the end. Stories may have interesting twists of plot and character development, but we look for the punch line to grab a hold of us at the end. Thus, we have the story of the man who drove by the dry cleaning business and noticed the bold sign outside: **My name is Fink and what do you think: I clean your clothes for nothing.** So the man drove home, gathered up every stitch of clothing that could be dry cleaned and brought it back to the shop. When he returned at the end of the week to pick up his laundry, he was handed a bill for \$50. He said, ‘Hold on here. Your sign out front says’...and the owned replied, “You read the sign wrong. It says: My name is Fink and what do you think; I clean your clothes for nothing????” We tend to remember the punch line.

So it is with Luke’s story of Jesus healing the ten lepers. The details of the story are quite interesting. The lepers approach Jesus. He has mercy on them. He decides to heal them. They head to the temple. All ten are made well. Only one returns to say thank you. All of these details are of great interest. Each detail spawns a sermon of its own. But what grabs me is the punch line at the end: Your faith has made you well.

Jesus, the good teacher, seizes on this teachable moment. The leper, now made clean, assumes that his good fortune is all due to having found the right doctor; his good fortune is all due to the power of Jesus to heal. It is like magic to him. He is full of gratitude and he can’t stop thanking Jesus enough. But Jesus doesn’t leave it at that. He might have said, Oh, you’re entirely welcome,” or “Don’t mentioned it.”

Instead, he looks into this man's eyes, sees into his soul, and says with a penetrating voice, "Your faith has made you well."

It's not so much that Jesus is down-playing his own authority, his own power. It's that Jesus is affirming the power of faith in a believer's heart. This story is about the power of faith. That's what grabs my attention this week; **the power of faith.**

I am sure this is what Luke had in mind as he wrote his Gospel. He knew the church would thrive wherever FAITH takes root. He saw in this Samaritan leper precisely the quality of faith that churches need in order to be a light in the world.

To have faith is to believe that in God's name all things are in the realm of possibility. Nothing is off the table. Frankly, this requires quite a leap! It requires a different kind of thinking. Soren Kierkegaard called it the 'leap of faith.'

When I say, 'nothing is off the table,' I can't help but think of Walter's Table and of Walter's faith. For Walter Buckingham, all things were possible to the one who believes. In Walter's heart, a murderer could be forgiven. A felon could be granted a fresh start. An alcoholic could find sobriety. A wayward grandson could turn his life around. A financially strapped family could tithe their income. A Bosnian family living in a detention camp could find a new life in America. We all saw in Walter what Luke saw in the Samaritan leper. It was his faith that made all the difference!

Faith moves mountains. Faith removes barriers. Faith opens doors. Jesus was constantly amazed at how little faith the disciples demonstrated. When he instructed them to feed 5000 people with five barley loaves and two fish, they thought he was off his rocker. They could not imagine it, could not believe that in God's name all things are possible. He chided them: 'If you had even as much faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed, you could move mountains!'

So, Jesus wasn't interested in moving from town to town working miracles, building up a reputation for himself. He was interested in moving from town to town inviting people to believe in the power of faith, in the simple truth that all things really are in the realm of possibility when God's name is invoked.

Most pastors I know of local churches are passionate about growing the churches they serve. By this, I don't mean growing the number of members. I mean growing the faith of the church, nurturing the willingness to take that proverbial leap of faith, extending the invitation to see what happens when reason takes a back seat and faith is allowed to rule the day.

Lots of people reasoned that 2009 was not a good year for a capital campaign to tear down our old building and build a new one. What was required was a leap of faith, an outrageous belief that in God's name all things become possible. Lots of people reasoned that teenagers have a hundred better things to do than to come to church on Wednesday evening for an hour and a half. What was required was a leap of faith, an outrageous belief that youth are hungry to feed their souls. Lots of people reasoned that an old abandoned High Street School wasn't worth rehabilitation. What was required was a leap of faith, an outrageous belief that pre-school education matters more than the cost of a new roof.

As we move forward together, being the church of Jesus Christ, my great hope is that we will keep walking by faith, keep believing that in God's name everything remains on the table of possibility. The ten lepers were all healed. They had all approached Jesus with the unreasonable expectation that he could make them whole. It was this astounding confidence that made all the difference. It would have been nice if all ten had returned to say thank you. Thank you is always nice to hear. But what the Gospel writer wants us to hear today is this: your faith has made you well. It is to a life of faith that we are called. In the greatest of hope, Amen!

