

They were together. Ten together.

Like soldiers in a fox hole as the shells are raining down - together.

Like to patients in the cancer ward forget all distinctions of race and class - they are together.

Like a community when a tornado has struck and rich and poor are in the shelter, together.

Ten lepers, together.

They were classified as unclean, required to keep a distance between themselves and everyone else.

As a person approached they cried out Unclean, Unclean, so that the person would be warned to stay away.

The ten could not go to the temple, to worship God for only the clean could worship there. They were not

welcome at a synogogue to pray and hear God's word with the people, for only the clean were welcome

there. they could not even share the meal table with their own family, God's law forbid it. They only had

each other. Until Jesus came along.

Jesus, Master, have mercy on us! they cried.

And he did. He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." If there was no sign of disease, the priest could declare them clean, ready to enter society, to enter worship with all the people once more.

As they went they were made clean. Surely they rushed to the priest. Except for one. A Samaritan.

The Jews considered Samaritans unclean by their birth. Halfbreeds, not pure Jews.

No priest would declare him clean.

He returned to Jesus, fell down at Jesus' feet, thanked Jesus.

Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean, the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Where were the nine?

Well, they were going where Jesus sent them. On their way to the priests.

But for this Samaritan Jesus was the only priest he would be received by, the only temple where he could worship. For this Samaritan Jesus was the place and the person in which he ^{had met} ~~would meet~~ God.

Jesus said to him, "Get up, go on your way, your faith has made you well."

How strange that this was a healing which divided. The ten would never be together again. Unless the nine were all ready to be declared unclean for being with the Samaritan.

If Jesus was the priest, the temple, the presence of God for all ten ^{could they} ~~then they~~ could be together. But otherwise their healing would divide.

Two are in the cancer ward together. Both have surgery, one is thought to be cancer free, the other needs chemo. Before the surgery they are sisters in their affliction. But after the surgery it will all depend. Will the one who needs no treatment flee? Will she stay away from the other so she will not need to remember what could have happened to her, what she yet may face? Will the healing divide?

Sinners are gathered in a church. Some of them have sins that are gaping wounds, still oozing pus, open raw, ugly. Others have sin that has healed over for now, maybe festering under the skin, maybe healthy. Will they be brothers, the open sinners with the outwardly good? Or will some be praying as that Pharisee in the temple did, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not like other men." Remember how he went on to thank God for how he tithed, and how he was not like the miserable tax collector who prayed beside him. Whatever healing God had given that Pharisee only divided him from his brother.

I wanted to talk about giving and gratitude today. The one leper returned to give thanks. I hope everyone of you will be full of gratitude as he was. But I know how easy it is for me to turn into that Pharisee.

Our Lord took the lowest seat at the table. He was born among the poor. He died with criminals.
Jesus who deserved every honor and glory and thanks, accepted scorn and criticism and dishonor. So that
he could stand with you. Not with you so much when there is honor and praise and glory for you, when
those who have helped are shouting their thanks to God for you. No he stood with you in the places that are
full of shame. In your weakness, in your need, in your death.

If as a person who is weak and shamed and needy you give ten percent, or three percent, or thirty
percent thanking God for God's grace to you, heaven will sing.

I hope that my gifts to God are always given in that spirit. And when they are not, when pride is
greater than gratitude in me as I write out a large check, then I trust that God will use you to hang onto me.

Stand with me, a sinner.