

Sunday 10th October 2004, Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7
- Psalm 66:1-11
- 2 Timothy 2:8-15
- Luke 17:11-19

Sermon notes

started talking about Leprosy and The Leprosy Mission (TLM)

Read from magazine article:

"The tremendous courage of people who have suffered leprosy and who have gone on to help others affected by the disease is being witnessed among leprosy workers around the world today.

One of those people is Arega Zelelew, who has overcome the personal stigma and challenges of leprosy to make an extraordinary contribution to society.

Arega was diagnosed with leprosy 1966 and developed severe disabilities.

Consequently, he battled prejudice and humiliation in his workplace. Fellow employees petitioned to have him dismissed and he was denied promotion. Adding to this, his wife divorced him and left him to raise his seven children alone. He would often walk past his own children in the street without acknowledging them for fear of shaming them.

"Leprosy is a ruthless thief, which first turns off all the lights before you notice that there is an intruder. Then in the total blackout it viciously creates, it robs you of every single irreplaceable treasure you possess," said Arega

Despite this, Arega is one of the few who has overcome discrimination to stay in his job until retirement age. Knowing the stigma was too strong to overcome at an individual level he relentlessly lobbied government offices for assistance. Through this, Arega became the founder of the Ex Leprosy Patients Association (ENAELP) and today more than 10,300 fellow victims of stigma and discrimination are on the way to obtaining social equality through the work of ENAELP.

Arega has always held true to a belief in himself, and in the worth of others affected leprosy. In 2003, at age 62, Arega was awarded TLM's Wellesley Bailey Award for Courage, Achievement and Outstanding Contribution to the Cause of Leprosy in honour of his tremendous personal courage and long battle against the prejudice surrounding leprosy in his home country, Ethiopia."

Some months ago at The Leprosy Mission talk at St John's by Dr Grace Brand about her pioneering work in India and other places.

The misery of the Leper in Jesus' day:

- banished
- no contact with family
- no income
- isolation
- dependent for food
- one authority said stand 50 metres away!

It was this rule the ten were obeying in today's story in "keeping their distance" but their common human

need had brought them together to make this plea to Jesus.

We know as the story unfolds that at least one was a Samaritan --- we can probably safely assume that the ten were a mixed bunch due to the fact that Jesus was going through the region of Samaria and Galilee.

*We know how the Samaritans were excluded and considered less than people because of divergent religious practice.

The Galileans on the other hand, while being looked down on as hillbillies, simple country folk, were still ethnically Jews.

William Barclay says: "Here is an example of the great Law of life. A common misfortune had broken down racial and national barriers---"

In the common tragedy of their leprosy, they had forgotten they were Jews and Samaritans, and remembered only that they were men in need."

Think of people you have been bound to through suffering or difficulty, (Theological college; Pandora's, St Philip's)

So many great stories have been based on this theme --- so many good movies where unlikely people, people at odds, are bound in a common need --- or a common quest.

Surely one thing that should draw humanity together is our common need for God---

But it so often doesn't!

Because we want God to be made in OUR IMAGE, we want God to fit our plans and ideas and prejudices.

But for these men it was a fight for survival, for life, for dignity, love, acceptance, food and healing... it was no longer an intellectual exercise!

So they stand "keeping their distance", calling out "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us".

Surely the search for life, dignity, love, acceptance, for daily bread and healing is the way we walk with people to meet God.

There are those who will simply take what is on offer and there is no conversation, no deeper understanding of their situation, no awareness of the possibility of better things --- such is the story of many who come looking for food parcels.

but then there are some who want to share their struggle, their pain and their search for better things.

These men had been bound together by their common illness **AND** their search for human wholeness.

Many years before when the people of Jerusalem were over run in 587 and many were taken captive, Jeremiah wrote to them telling them **NOT** to let the situation get the better of them **BUT** to get on with life together and even though they were not where they wanted to be, that God was still with them. They were encouraged to pray for Babylon and their captors.

As well as bringing them together as a group, they could have a positive effect on their locality by inviting God into their struggle. It was a remnant of these people and their offspring who became the basis of the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

Paul too speaks to Timothy about sharing the suffering of living out the gospel; indeed sharing the suffering of Jesus himself. Paul refers also to his own suffering with and for his fellow Christians.

There appears to be this theme of **shared** struggle and yes, even suffering --- because we do become troubled when one among us is suffering.

The end of the gospel story is that the men come to

Jesus and find healing, but the healing is interesting because Jesus tells them to go to the priest and it is in their going that they are healed.
they are simply to move on --- get on with their lives --- in trust.

And they find themselves healed/cleansed.

One man has awakened a chord of gratitude and gives thanks --- he seems to be there to remind us of the need for gratitude in all things --- God, and each other.

the fact that he was a Samaritan reminds us that faith and gratitude are not the possession of those who call themselves God's people.

Healing and gratitude!

Finally your faith has made you well....

literally, the word for healing is the same as **salvation**

your faith has saved you...

Ultimately, the human quest finds its answer in the knowledge and experience of God.