

## Pentecost 18 **The 10 Lepers**

Isaiah says: ***“your evil has made a separation between you and your God - your sins have hidden his face from you so that he doesn’t hear you”*** ([Isaiah 59:2](#))

That’s the way it is.

Nothing sinful, nothing impure, in anyway can exist in God’s presence.

Why? Do we have a grumpy God?

No we have a gracious God who makes it very clear that his absolute purity destroys impurity

Paper, Scissors, Rock – purity trumps impurity.

So, God makes it absolutely sure that sinful, impure people do not come near him – lest the purity destroys us.

Today we have 10 Lepers. Lepers had to call out to anyone who came near them – “watch out, stay away, unclean, unclean”.

Remember when Moses got too near God – God called out – “watch out, stay away, I am perfectly pure, watch out”.

Back in the day – in BC – it was no different to now.

People sinned – people sinned just for something to do.

People got sick.

People got lumps and bumps, and boils, and rashes just like we do..

We cannot be in God’s presence, with sin, with lumps and bumps, with weeping and bleeding.

God’s pure, purity would consume us in a flash.

But God created us to be in his presence.

God actually likes us – he made us to be in communion with him.

So along comes the priestly office – the pastoral office – a system of rites and rituals to makes us right with God.

It’s complicated – but it’s all there in Leviticus (13)– just so we AD people know what it was like. Let’s say we have **a rash** – rashes are pretty straight forward.

You have to let the pastor examine your rash.

Now, if the hair in the rash has turned white and it’s more than skin deep, it’s a skin disease.

The pastor declares you to be “ceremonially unclean” – that means your isolated, from family, from the community, from the temple, from God.

But if the rash doesn’t appear to be more than skin deep and the hair in it hasn’t turned white, the pastor will just isolate you for 7 days – like COVID.

On the seventh day the pastor has another look and if he sees that your rash is unchanged and hasn’t spread, then he’ll isolate you for another seven days.

Then if the rash has faded and has not spread, he will pronounce you clean; because it’s only a rash.

If anyone has a **skin swelling**, and the hair has turned white, and there is raw flesh – the pastor shall pronounce that you have a chronic disease, and you are “ceremonially unclean”.

He will isolate you indefinitely because you are already unclean.

**Boils, boils**, are not so bad, funny enough.

If you have a boil you are automatically unclean – but if the boil heals you must show the pastor.

So long as the hair on that boil has not turned white and there is a clean scar the pastor can pronounce you clean.

**Oh, to be a pastor in the BC world.**

### **Burns**

If you have a burn and a reddish-white spot appears in the raw flesh of the burn, and if the hair in it has turned white, the pastor will pronounce you ceremonially unclean and place you in 7 days isolation.

But if the spot has not spread, and has faded, the pastor will pronounce it to be a “simple swelling” and declare you to be clean.

Now a **sore on the chin** – these are bad. If you have a sore on your chin, the pastor is to examine the sore, and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair in it has turned yellow and thin, you are pronounced unclean immediately – and isolated then for 7 days.

If on the seventh day the sore has not spread and there is no yellow hair in it and there appears to be new black hairs growing in it – your pastor will pronounce you healed and clean.

### **White spots?**

If you have white spots on the skin, show the pastor and if the spots are dull white, it is a harmless rash – nothing to worry about and he will pronounce you clean.

Baldness - a male disease?

If a man who has lost his hair and is bald he is to be pronounced clean.

Even if he has lost his hair from the front of his scalp and has a bald forehead, he is to be pronounced clean.

**Mould** – God doesn't like mould.

Any fabric or leather that is mouldy should be presented to the pastor – if it's a greenish or reddish mould he shall pronounce the mould – a “defiling mould”.

The pastor must burn all the mouldy fabric and leather.

Now this could be **leprosy**

If you have reddish-white sores on your head or body it's immediately pronounced a defiling disease.

“Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover their face and cry out, “Stay away, Unclean! Unclean!”<sup>46</sup> As long as you have the disease you remain unclean. You must live alone; You must live outside the community.

Remember Ben Hur - mum?

Oh, to be a pastor in the BC world.

There are pages and pages more.

Can you imagine the section on the poor pastor and the poor woman in her “period of uncleanness”.

Saddle inspections – no we’re not going to go there.

Being pronounce ceremonial unclean – meant isolation from family, community, from God.

Remember the poor woman with the “issue of blood” for over 12 years – no wonder she just wanted to touch Jesus and be made clean – so she could be a part of society again.

Unclean – unable to be what you were intended to be.

But God in his grace used the pastor to guide the people through cleansing rituals.

Again, it is complicated – **the bottom line is that the blood of an innocent animal was accepted on behalf of the person making an offering or sacrifice.**

The animal’s purity made the person offering it pure.

John, Jesus’ cousin – had not seen Jesus for a few years and sees him walking down the street.

He calls out – what? “Behold the Lamb of God”.

That’s John’s job to make announcements – “I am voice in the wilderness”.

“Behold the Lamb of God”.

The perfect lamb – the lamb able to make all people clean and pure, and forgiven, is here.

Jesus comes across 10 lepers.

Now we know what they have been through – reddish, whitish, spots have appeared on their body – they’ve been to the pastor – they’ve been declared “ceremonially unclean”.

Remember they must wear torn clothes, they must let their hair be unkempt, they must cover their faces, they must live alone, they must live outside the camp, they must cry out, “Stay away, Unclean! Unclean!” as long as they have the disease.

Jesus came across their path – and they brake every rule.

They didn’t shout – “stay away, we are unclean”.

They didn’t show their – weeping sores – their stubby fingers.

They shouted, “Jesus, Have mercy on us”.

Jesus simply replied – go and show yourself to the pastor.

As they turned and walked to find the pastor – they realised they were healed.

Their skin had been restored.

Can you imagine – at last you can be restored to your community – at last you can wear clean clothes – at last you can have a haircut.

How do you feel?

1 of the 10 came back to thank Jesus.

Jesus said to him – **be on your way your faith has made you well.**

When Jesus caught out that woman with the “issue of blood”.

He asked who touched me. The woman said it was me – and told him why.

She thought she was going to be told off.

He said to her: **be on your way your faith has made you well.**

The faith here is coming to Jesus to be made clean again – to be reunited with God and your community.

The faith here is in the receiving of that healing gift and giving thanks.

The grace of God here is that all people have the opportunity to have their unclean, unholy, relationship with God fully restored.

The ritual of reconciliation with God still stands.

The need for cleansing at the altar still stands.

The need for pure innocent blood to cover your unholy life still stands.

But “Behold the lamb of God!”

Listen to Hebrews (9): *When Christ came as the high priest ... He did not enter God's presence by the means of the blood of goats and calves; he entered the Most Holy Place once and for all by his own blood, so obtaining eternal redemption.*

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean will sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

How much more, then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death...?

Jesus Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to take away sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

This is us today – it's done – we are made right with God through Jesus.

Back in the day – it was 1 in 10 – who returned and gave thanks with their gifts, with their money, with their lives, with their acts of love.

They gave thanks for being made whole and clean – for being united to God.

1 in 10.

Which one are you in that group of 10?

Where do you stand?

Sometimes when we look for volunteers, or look into the offering bowl it seems there are only 1 in a hundred or 1 in a 1000 giving thanks.

I pray you are the 1; or you're the 10 in a hundred; or the 100 in a 1000, same thing, that gives thanks to God for all his goodness to you and me – for him sacrificing Jesu his son.

1 in 10 is ok if you're the one.

Giving thanks - That's faith.

**Be on your way your faith has made you well. Amen.**

***Lord we ask you to restore us each day to live the life of thanks you have intended for us. Amen.***