

“Restored or Saved?”

I invite you to enter into your imagination. Imagine you are reading or listening to this Gospel for the very first time — not in the 21st century, but in the decade of the 70s somewhere in the Roman Empire. We are standing by a river, and close by there is a table with some food and drink on it. Someone from a small, odd, almost cultish organisation called The Way — or the Jesus Followers — has gathered us, a small group of people around them, people with different and no faith, and is reading this long story out that we, 2000 years later, know as Luke’s Gospel.

This group isn’t meeting in a grand cathedral or a well-funded institution. They’re part of something quieter, more organic — a movement that feels both ancient and fresh. Like the early Jesus-followers in the 70s AD, they’re listening to Luke’s Gospel as if for the first time, just after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem — a seismic event that left many wondering where God could now be found.

When we get to this bit, we would be approaching the end — this story is set on Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem for that fateful final week. As first-time readers or hearers, we would be coming close to the moment where we have to make a decision about how we will go on with life and faith after we have met Jesus through the words of this Gospel and heard about the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Having met Jesus, in a fashion at

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least, through the word, would you come back for more, or just carry on as normal, as a person of a different or no faith?

Perhaps Luke anticipated this decision in today's story.

These ten men could be Galilean Jews or Samaritans; we are not told to begin with. They come to Jesus suffering from ill-health. The illness unites them — they have common issues of leprosy and exclusion from others — and in Jesus they see someone who can help with both conditions. The nature of the healing is strange: Jesus lays no hand on them; he commands no demonic force to leave; he sends them to the priests. And it is in obedience to that instruction that, at some point, healing occurs.

The healing is both physical — better skin — and presumably social: they can return to their normal lives. Job done.

But then the twists start. Firstly, one of their number returns to thank Jesus personally. Now technically the other nine are still being obedient — Jesus never told them to come back. But yet this one does. Then we find out that he was a Samaritan — perhaps a surprise to some of our group who are listening, until we realise that about 20 minutes ago we heard another story about a Samaritan doing a surprising and good thing.

As the story unfolds, we reach this moment: ten men are healed, but only one returns. And in that return, something deeper happens — not just

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healing, but saving. The others may have received restoration, but the Samaritan receives transformation. He chooses relationship over ritual, presence over prescription.

The final twist comes in the last sentence: “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” In the original Greek, this phrase carries more weight — it actually translates as “your faith has saved you.” Being healed is one thing, but being saved — now that takes the story of Jesus onto a whole new level.

There is much that we have heard, and go on to hear in this Gospel, about the Temple. Jesus is on his way there now. For us in the 70s, the Temple has gone. Perhaps it was to temples in Samaria or Jerusalem where the other nine men with leprosy went to see their priests — and where they stayed. They may have been healed, but were they saved?

We can make an intelligent guess at what Luke thinks, without ever being absolutely sure. But the question lingers — for them, and for us: what kind of healing are we seeking? And what kind of response will we offer? Will we settle for restoration, or pursue transformation? Will we return to our rituals, or fall at Jesus’ feet in worship, gratitude, and faith?

Would you, having heard the whole story, go back to your normal lives, faith and rituals? Or would you return to metaphorically prostrate yourself

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in front of Jesus — perhaps by being baptised in the river and sharing the Eucharist that has been set up for those who want it?

Would you have followed the Samaritan in discovering what was, for Luke, the correct posture of worship, healing and saving — not by being in the temple of Samaria, Rome or Jerusalem, or their equivalents today, but prostrated at Jesus' feet?

Amen.

Rev'd Richard Haynes 12 October 2025 17th Sunday after Trinity