

Sermon for Fifteenth after Trinity, 2021

1Chronicles 29:10-14. Colossians 1:3-4 & 9-14. Psalm 116:11-end.
Luke 17:11-19.

The Collect: Almighty and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that are according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Luke 17:14b 'And as they went they were healed.'

At times of uncertainty, and when major changes threaten to turn life upside down, humility must make peace with wise counsel. Albert Einstein once remarked to a Belgian priest called Georges LeMaitre 'Your calculations are correct, but your grasp of physics is abominable.' Fr LeMaitre had mathematically shown that the universe had started from a 'primeval atom' in what came to be called 'The Big Bang.' It contradicted Einstein's belief that the universe was in a steady state, and therefore not expanding. We learn from this encounter that a genius isn't always right, and that humility is a liberating quality that leads to new horizons. During the last week or two, there have been billions of clashes between billions of people about billions of matters that were thought to be of infinite importance. So, it seems that the liberating quality which we call 'humility' is probably as rare as a quark in a black hole! Imagine what life would be like if humility was not quite so rare. Relationships would be less explosive. Maybe in heaven we shall experience a sense of freedom from the human need to be proven right to our own satisfaction all the time. There in heaven we will know that whatever we said or thought on earth was tarnished by ignorance or hubris (as we concluded last week).

One person who showed humility last week was the Bishop of Ebbsfleet: one of the 'Flying Bishops' who served High Church Traditionalists in the Church of England. He had decided to 'swim the Tiber'. He resigned and is to be received into the Roman Catholic Church. His predecessor as Bishop of Ebbsfleet, and a couple of others had done the same nearly ten years previously. The Church in Wales decided not to replace the only equivalent Provincial Assistant Bishop in Wales when he retired in 2008. Rather, all members and clergy would have to accept the ministry of the local Diocesan Bishop: there was to be no alternative. Further, last week, the Governing Body of the CinW passed a motion to enable clergy to bless same sex marriages in church. These events are all linked by the desire to be true to what has been called 'conscience' or 'the leading of the Holy Spirit.' Who decides what is right for the whole church? I think, ultimately, we have to conclude that whatsoever produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit, is likely to be the right decision (Galatians 5:22-23 love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). Clearly, humility, under God, produces fruit; whereas selfishness and hubris leads to decay.

Now, our Gospel portion today, recalls a situation in which ten lepers were healed, but only one returned to Jesus to express his gratitude. Jesus seems to be either surprised at the returnee's response, or unhappy at the response of the others. St Luke is never one to make random remarks, and we gloss over what he records at our peril. Here he tells us that Jesus was walking between

Samaria and Galilee. Not *in* Samaria or *in* Galilee, but in between. That is his way of saying that rules applying to the declaration of ritual cleanliness could be Samaritan or Galilean, depending where you are standing geographically. Further, the ten lepers at the edge of the village, couldn't be identified by whether they obeyed the Samaritan interpretation of the Torah, or the Galilean expression of Jewish observance. In short, we can't 'pigeon-hole' them. Thus, an onlooker doesn't know whether the group will go to the priests on Mount Zion to be pronounced clean, or to the priests of Mount Gerizim. But, we do know that these lepers had not yet been healed by Jesus. Nor did the lepers know themselves that they had been pronounced clean. No, they had to take a decision to obey the Lord, and to move off on their respective journeys. Lk 17:14 'And as they went they were cleansed.' They had all declared in a loud voice that Jesus was Master, and could have mercy on them. They were treated by unaffected people as if they were as ritually defiling as contact with a dead body. In short, being a leper was like a living death.

One of the lepers saw that he was healed, as he went, and returned praising God in a loud voice. St Luke, thought to be a physician, uses the word 'healed' here, rather than 'cleansed'. The man saw that he was healed. But, the priests could only pronounce a former leper 'cleansed' after very elaborate shaving, washing and inspecting, repeated a week apart. So it seems that for this one leper something more than ritual obedience had happened; even before he got to the Temple. Jesus confirms this. The priests of Zion or Gerizim didn't get the chance to pronounce him clean. And Jesus didn't choose to! Rather, the man had been obedient to Jesus the Master, and by responding in faith he had been made well. The fact that he was a Samaritan, made the a teaching point to the onlookers; as was made in the previous parable of the Good Samaritan. Faith is not restricted, but it needs to be accompanied by obedience and humility. It can be powerful in a gentile, or an apostate, or an orthodox Jew. 'And as they went they were healed.'

Brothers and Sisters, faith demands obedience, humility, and action. It begs the questions: faith in what, and obedience to whom? If faith is well-placed, but not acted upon, it doesn't produce fruit. If faith is just something that people equate with religious practice, then it can lead to hubris. Bishop Goodall of Ebbsfleet has concluded that being in communion with the Bishop of Rome is a necessary act of faith for him. The Governing Body of the CinW has concluded that it can bless intentions which are disobedient our Lord's intention in creating male and female, and defined in the Bible. They do this so as to be approved outwardly by a particular group of people. Faith demands obedience, humility, and action. It demands obedience to our Lord, and we should try our utmost not to thwart commands in the Bible. We humbly do as He says. It is in the doing that we are healed. We don't just go along with outward signs and pronouncements. We act in faith.

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.