

October 14, 2007

Luke 17:11-19

I've got baseball fever right now. The Cleveland Indians are doing well. The Red Sox are tough. That's who the Indians are playing right now in the American League Championship Series that leads up to the World Series. But a little known fact... God is an Indians fan. Did you know that? Yeah! Of course, God's probably a Red Sox fan, too. He loves them all. It's sometimes hard to admit that I guess.

As a baseball fan, a true fan, you remember the good times and the not so good times. And the Indians have had their fair share of not so good times. One of them? August 12, 1994. Does that date ring a bell with anyone? That was the first day of the 232 day strike, when Major League Baseball players, everyone of them – Cleveland Indians included – went on strike. The Indians were by far and away the best team in all of baseball at that point in time. They were well on their way to the postseason for the first time in four decades. And that was the first day of the 232 day lockout. Their season was over. It all started August 12, 1994. And who had tickets to that August 12, 1994 game? Yours truly. I had tickets to go to Jacobs Field to watch the Indians play the Milwaukee Brewers back when they were in the American League. But as it was, day one of the 232 day lockout began that day... August 12, 1994. The tickets were no good. How frustrating!

It's extremely disappointing to have tickets that are no good. You're stuck. All those hopes – dashed. So much opportunity is lost. Our Gospel reading from Luke, is all about tickets and dashed hopes and lockouts. Jesus is the giver of some pretty good tickets. As Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem, he sees ten people who have leprosy. They're diseased. And because their disease is contagious, they aren't able to go near anyone. In fact, the lepers are given a whole section of town for themselves. They're quarantined. They're locked out from the rest of the town. Their only ticket back into town is to be healed from their disease. These lepers see Jesus walking on by – and each of these ten lepers begin to cry out for his mercy, for his healing. They cry out for Jesus' mercy in their lives.

And our text tells us that Jesus "sees" them. It doesn't say that Jesus goes over to the lepers and see how they're doing. He just "sees" them. But this isn't just a glance toward them and then he moves on. It's not the kind of "seeing" where you browse or skim. He sees them with eyes that go straight to the heart, straight to the soul. He sees their pain. He sees their struggle. He sees their dashed hopes of being able to simply spend time with their family and friends, their neighbors. They're all quarantined. These lepers are all locked out. They're all stuck, without any tickets into their own community. Jesus sees their pain, and he says, "Go and show yourself to the priests." The priests are the ones who have the say of whether or not you can come back into the town. The priests are the ones who tear off the ticket stub and let you in. If they see you're a leper, there's no way you're getting back in. The ticket back in to see your family and friends as a leper is to no longer have the disease that forced you to be kicked out in the first place.

What "tickets" are we looking for in our lives this morning? Are we looking for a ticket for healing in our lives? Do you know someone who is looking for healing in their life? There are all sorts of different needs for healing. Healing for struggling relationships. Healing in midst of loneliness. Healing for broken hearts and souls. Physical healing – healing for our diseases, our pain, our grief. We may think of "healing" as being a weird, "televangelist" kind of a thing. That's not really what healing is about. That's not what healing is about at all really. Take a look at these lepers in our reading. First, they know their

pain. They know their brokenness. That's all they have to think about in their lives. Their quarantined, locked out of doing anything else in their lives. They know their pain better than anything else. Healing is first, knowing our pain, knowing what's broken in our lives. Healing begins by knowing what's broken in our lives, in our hearts, in our souls... knowing it thoroughly, inside and out.

And then these lepers have the chance to bring their pain to Jesus' attention. They take that chance. They work up the courage to cry out to him for his mercy and healing. Healing begins by first knowing our pain. And then, we work up the courage to take that pain to Jesus, to bring our brokenness to his attention – to take that chance. These lepers simply asked Jesus for mercy. Actually, they didn't even ask. They demanded it. They yell out together, "Jesus, have mercy on us!" They weren't asking. They were demanding it. They felt like enough's enough.

And Jesus sees the pain behind their demands. So Jesus demands, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." It's a strange feeling to show up at the gate without any tickets in your hand. These lepers are still diseased at this point. They have no ticket. They have no way in. But, they go... to the priests, to the ones who can take their ticket, the ones who can let them back into their normal way of life again. And as they're on their way, they see their skin showing life again. They see their sores disappearing. They see themselves for how Jesus saw them – healed and strong. At last, they have their tickets! They're ready to be let back into town.

But, then there's a twist. One of these ten lepers – former lepers – stops in his tracks. We're not sure what conversation may have gone on at that point between the nine who wanted to keep going to the priests and the one who stopped in his tracks. We don't know. But the one who stopped wasn't going to go show himself to those priests, not that day anyway. Why show yourself to the priests when you can show yourself to the Son of God, the Lord of Life? This one person turns and goes back to find Jesus. The other nine probably thought he was crazy. The other nine former lepers, now with their tickets in hand, all healed up, are accepted back into their town. And they certainly have a story to tell. The other one, finds himself kneeling at Jesus' feet giving thanks and praise to God. It's not that this one didn't care about the other nine who kept on walking with their tickets to go see the priests. They were probably his friends. That's all who he had to talk to and hang out with everyday. It's not that he doesn't care about his own family and friends back in the town. It's just that this one simply wanted to spend more time with Jesus, to sit at Jesus' feet and to give him thanks.

Are you looking for tickets for good seats? How about sitting at Jesus' own feet? Those are pretty good seats. A lot of tears are shed at those feet. A lot of thanks and praise are given at those feet. A lot of healing takes place at those feet. We have a ticket to come and to kneel at those feet, too of course. Christ sees our pain with those eyes that stare directly into our hearts, too.

Spend some time at Jesus' feet this week. You won't be disappointed. Those are good seats. Cry out for Jesus' mercy. Cry out for his healing. Be open and honest with him. Know your pain. Take courage and ask for his healing. A lot of tears are shed at those feet. A lot thanks and praise are given at those feet. Give him your tears. Give him your thanks. Give him your praise. He sees you. He doesn't just glance toward you and move on. He *sees* our pain. Spend some time at Jesus' feet this week. Those are the best seats in the house! Amen.