

Who are the people we meet unexpectedly on our way? Not the ones we plan to see or schedule into our calendars, but the ones who simply appear at the crossroads, in the middle of an ordinary day. Maybe it's the person who holds the door when our hands are full. Or the neighbor who happens by and stays to help with the gardening just when we need it. Or perhaps it's a child who reminds us, just by being themselves, that joy is contagious.

How about you? Did you meet anyone unexpectedly this week? Someone who caught you off guard, or showed up at just the right time? Someone who, in their own quiet way, reminded you that grace still surprises us? Because grace does that. It catches us by surprise, interrupts our plans, and often arrives wearing someone else's face.

That's what happens in today's gospel. Luke tells us that Jesus is traveling through the region between Galilee and Samaria. He's moving through an *in-between place*... the space where roads and cultures cross, where the familiar meets the unfamiliar, where insiders and outsiders bump shoulders.

And there, along the way, ten people appear. Ten people who cry out from a distance, "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*" They are lepers, people forced to live at the margins, set apart from their families and neighbors. In their time, this separation wasn't necessarily born of cruelty but of caution, meant to protect the community from illness. Still, the cost was high. Theirs was a hard existence—isolated from worship, from touch, from the simple grace of belonging. And, indeed, any talents they would have contributed to the community are lost as well. You see, the truth is, isolationism always carries with it some kind of cost for all sides of a community.

And yet, for these ten, even in their separation, they find one another. They form a small community of their own, companions in suffering, holding onto one another when the world would not. They know what it means to be cast aside, but they also know the deep ache for restoration. Restoration not only of body, but of dignity, relationship, and home. So when Jesus passes by, they lift their voices together, a chorus of hope from the edges of society, longing not just for healing but for welcome. For the chance to be seen again, included again, loved again.

And Jesus sees them. He doesn't just glance—he sees. He recognizes them not as a nuisance or a burden, but as beloved children of God. And he tells them simply, "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" It's a curious instruction. He doesn't say, "You're healed." He doesn't touch them. He doesn't make any promises. He just sends them.

And here's what fascinates me: **they don't ask a single question.** Jesus simply says, "Go," and they go. No one asks, "Why?" or "What good will that do?" No one demands proof or a sign or a timeline. **They simply turn and start walking.**

I wonder.... would I be that ready? Would you? Would we be so willing to move before there's any sign that something's changed or would change? Because sometimes, when life has been hard, when we've been hurt or disappointed, we want to see evidence first. We want to know the plan before we take the step.

Rachel Held Evans once wrote, *"Faith isn't about having everything figured out ahead of time. Faith is about trusting God enough to step out into the unknown."* That's exactly what these people do. They walk toward the priests without knowing what they'll show them. They walk toward a future they can't yet see. And Luke tells us, *"As they went, they were made clean."*

Not before. Not after. **As they went.** The healing doesn't happen in a single moment; it unfolds in motion. Grace meets them not when they've arrived, but as they go... step by step, side by side. I think that's how it so often works for us too. Faith is rarely about standing still until we're sure. It's about walking forward, even when we're uncertain, **open to what, and who,** we might meet along the way.

"As they went, they were made clean." It's Luke's reminder to us that transformation is most often a journey, not some momentary flash of light. Grace is more likely to unfold across the miles of our daily living than in one dazzling moment. Healing is discovered as we walk together...in trust, in hope, in community.

And notice, **they go together.** Ten companions on the road. Ten travelers learning, step by step, that God's mercy is wide enough for all of them. Faith, in this story, is communal. They walk together before they see the change. And isn't that what we do in the Church? We walk together, even when we don't have all the answers. We pray for mercy together. We trust that grace is already at work, even when we can't see it yet.

In a few moments, we'll bring a child to the waters of baptism...another step on this journey of faith. For baby Nora, grace has already arrived: in family, in community, in love. Today we simply name it, celebrate it, and join it.

Once upon a time, baptism was often seen as something we had to do—a ritual to "get done," to make sure a child was safe in God's hands. And there was real love in that practice, a sacred instinct to entrust a precious life to God's care. But over time, the Church has grown into a wider understanding. We no longer baptize with the notion to earn God's favor or to secure salvation. We baptize to celebrate the grace and blessing that's already present. Baptism doesn't rescue; it reveals.

And it doesn't change God's heart toward us; **it changes our awareness of the love that's been there all along.** And that's why we do it together, here, in the midst of the congregation. Because

Nora's story isn't private. It's part of our story too. Faith is not something we do alone. We promise to walk with her—to teach and to listen, to hold and to bless, to help her notice the Spirit's presence on her own journey.

When we baptize, we're not saying, "Now God loves you." **We're saying, "You belong. You've always belonged. And we're in this together."** And that promise—that we are not alone—is at the heart of today's gospel too. Those ten travelers find healing not in solitude, but in community.

And one of them, when he sees what's happened, turns back. He returns, praising God, falling at Jesus' feet, giving thanks. And Jesus says to him, *"Your faith has made you well."* Or more literally: *"Your faith has made you whole."*

All ten were healed, but one becomes whole, because wholeness isn't just about physical restoration. It's about gratitude, connection, and joy. Healing repairs what is broken. Wholeness reconnects us—to God, to grace, to each other.

That's what baptism does too. It gathers us back into belonging. **It reminds us that wholeness isn't something we achieve; it's something we receive—as a gift, as grace, as love poured out in community.** And just like those travelers, our wholeness unfolds as we go. It grows in the walking, in the trusting, in the giving thanks along the way.

So today, we remember: this is not our work alone. We can't control the Spirit. We can't set limits on grace. The Spirit moves where she will—surprising us, healing us, and making us whole, as we go.

Amen.