

12. THE DISEASE OF LEPROSY

Lest we miss the drama involved, it might help to recall what kind of disease we are talking about. Leprosy is still a problem in India, of course, where Mother Teresa worked with lepers for many years. It still stalks parts of Africa and Asia. But leprosy has largely disappeared from the Western world, so we tend to forget what a terrible and terrifying disease it really is.

You can carry the disease for years before the symptoms appear, but leprosy first appears as nodules on your skin which grow larger and larger, until they force deep wrinkles all over your body. Then your lips, nose and ear lobes grow thicker, until your face begins to resemble an animal's. You get ulcerations everywhere, which cause your arms and legs to be horribly mutilated. You start losing your fingers and toes and as the disease continues to progress, you are left blinded.

As if the disease itself wasn't cruel enough, there was also the social ostracism. Even in the Bible, there were strict rules given for dealing with lepers (see Leviticus 13-14). So when Jesus heal 10 people with Leprosy can you imagine how they felt. The joy, the relief. To be healed, to be able to rejoin the family. How thankful they must have felt. So why did only one return to give thanks?

But first a story of Gratitude Adjustment

I have had the honour of doing mission work in 2 3rd world Countries. I did short term ministry in the Diocese of Eldoret in Kenya Africa and longer Mission work (3 months) along with several shorter missions with the Diocese of Belize in the Country of Belize in Central America. This mission work changed my life. I would encourage any who get the opportunity for short term mission work in another country to take it. It could be life changing for you. Once travel is allowed again and safe, I will be looking to form mission teams to go to Belize to help in the schools there. Let me tell you how these missions have affected me.

We arrived in Kenya about 5 months after the civil uprising that took the lives of thousands in a very short time period. In our travels I saw tent cities or over 8000 people who were violently displaced from their homes and villages.

The civil uprising was over an election where most of the federal government was replaced by another political party and as much of this was based on tribal allegiances it meant the firing of thousands and them being replaced with those of the tribe elected. Within a very short time thousands were dead as those leaving were not willing to go. We were asked to go by the bishop of Eldoret to talk about reconciliation as his diocese included large groups of both tribes and there was much hurt pain and mistrust among the members. And in some case family members who were killed, raped or abused by other members of the church or their relatives.

We were welcomed by the church, but the conditions of the country shook me up. Most of the homes we visited were not much more than shacks with no electricity. These conditions were the same in the city or in rural areas. The basic food was maize. A kind of corn mush. Anything else was a bonus. I visited homes where they were raising chickens in their home. They considered themselves fortunate. There was little or no work. Everything was based on your tribal affiliation. Poverty was extreme and rampant. At that time schooling was almost non-existent for most and then only for the males of the local tribe. I met people separated from their spouses because they were of different tribes and their lives were endangered. All this in a time when HIV and AIDS were at its height.

Belize was very different. Although poverty was not as extreme it was very evident. There are almost no public schools. The vast majority of the schools were and still are organized and run by the churches with a little help from the government. A quickly growing immigrant population made up a large portion of extreme poverty. Exploitation from foreign countries, the US and Canada being among them, has taken much of the economical profit out of the country and kept salaries and wages low. There is no welfare and most health services are restricted to those that could pay for it. Each time I came home from either of these countries I realize how blessed I was. It was nothing I did. Nothing I earned. Nothing I knew. I was blessed simply because I had the good fortune to be born in Canada. I began to realize how privileged I was. Even growing up on welfare I had more than them. More freedom, more opportunity, more incentive to strive for more. During this time, I had what you might call a Gratitude Adjustment.

In Canada we are a very privileged group. We have much to be thankful. We have so much. But many of us are like the nine people with leprosy who were healed but never came back to say thank you. Why did they not come back? We do not know but here is a list of possible reasons or excuses:

- One waited to see if the cure was real.
- One waited to see if it would last.
- One said he would see Jesus later.
- One decided that he had never had leprosy in the first place.
- One said he would have gotten well anyway.
- One gave the glory to the priests.
- One said, "O, well, Jesus didn't really do anything."
- One said, "Any rabbi could have done it."
- One said, "I was already much improved."

It is so easy to take what we have for granted. We need an attitude adjustment. We need to give thanks for what we have.

Thanksgiving. At this time we can be so busy with our families, with our visiting, that we forget to say thank you. Let us take a little time to realize how much we have and be thankful. Let us take a little time to ask how we can show our gratitude to the world around us. Let us be thankful.