

Run Into the Arms of Love

For my third TIM talk, I was again given free reign to speak on any text I wished. I wanted to choose something which was of particularly strong importance to me at the time.

Again my **target audience** was Stellenbosch students. The talk was presented on 12 August 2009.

The Talk

¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

¹⁴When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” – Luke 17:11–19 (NIV)

I'm sure everyone here knows all too well of the current flu pandemic which is sweeping not only through Stellenbosch and the Cape, but indeed the entire world. Of particular concern is the H1N1 flu virus. The WHO has stopped giving out infection tallies, as they can no longer accurately track the spread of the virus. They are, in fact, stunned by how rapidly this virus has spread around the world.

I'm sure everyone here knows someone who has or recently had the H1N1 virus. There is great concern over it, especially after the announcement that Ruan Müller—an otherwise healthy fellow student—passed away from it. People who are identified as having the disease are sent home from rez to protect the others from it. That is what is happening here at Stellenbosch. When this is no longer a viable option, entire schools and universities close in an effort to eliminate contact between the infected and the healthy.

We have a natural understanding of infection and the need for isolation. There is strong evidence that in ancient times—long before the discovery of microbes and pathogens—people knew that it was necessary to separate the healthy from the unhealthy. In ancient times such isolation was not very forgiving, however. The sick were often left to their own devices and many times left to die. In such dire times, the sick would band together and help and encourage each other until either health or death came.

Turning to the Text

This is the situation we find in Luke 17. It is unlikely that the people had actual leprosy, because the Greek word translated as “leprosy” is terribly ambiguous and could refer to any number of infectious skin diseases. Many of these diseases were benign and did not pose significant threat to people's health. But they were still put aside and isolated from society, because the concern here was not only with health, but with cleanliness. The Law given to Moses states (in Leviticus 13) that people with certain types of diseases are unclean and should be excluded from general society. This was not simply isolation, but also ostracism. They were excluded from society and sent to live outside the camp, town or city where the other unclean things were, like the garbage dumps and latrines.

In our passage, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He had been travelling through Galilee, Judea and east of the Jordan river and did many miracles and taught people about the Kingdom of Heaven. He had acquired quite a following and reputation in this time. The lepers (as I shall call them) no doubt knew he was on his way through news reports from other travellers. They probably waited for them and hoped he would heal them. When they saw him, they knew he could save them from their

sorry state and cried out to him.

Jesus characteristically responds calmly and with compassion, "Go, show yourselves to the priests.". It is worth noting the faith of the lepers here: they left and headed towards the town and only on the way were they healed. Had they entered the town still sick, the consequences no doubt would have been dire for them. But the word of Jesus is good and they are healed.

Of the ten, one man realises what happened and returns to praise God and thank Jesus for the mercy he had received. We are told he was a Samaritan. Due to the popularity of the parable of the Good Samaritan I believe many people think that Samaritans were mostly noble and honourable people. But there was much animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans: they often refused help or assistance to each other. But it is a Samaritan which returns to Jesus. Jesus is surprised by the fact that not only did only one return to thank him, but that this person was a "foreigner", someone whom Jesus wasn't strictly sent to minister for (Mat 15:24). Jesus sends him on his way and assures him that his faith has healed him, although another translations can also be that his faith had saved him.

This story in the life of Jesus is very significant for us today. Living in this world, we are all saturated with sin. It is this sin, which is a rebellion towards God, which makes us truly unclean. Because of our sin towards God and towards one another, we deserve to be thrown out, cut off from this world and burnt with the garbage. This is how it is. We are all liars and thieves and adulterers. Most often the world does not know of these things; it is kept in our hearts, where it shapes who we are and eats away at our conscience and soul.

We deserve damnation. But this is not the message Jesus brings. Jesus brings a message of salvation. And to attain this salvation, we need only call out to him: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!". There is no more than this that needs to be done, because Jesus already did what was required for sins to be atoned for: nails were put through his flesh, his blood ran down a wooden beam and his bones were broken. He died on the cross for me and for you. And to him was given life and glory so that he may forgive the sins of any who call on him.

If you struggle with your sin, if you are burdened and weighed down, come to him. Call out to him and receive his gift of grace. Become clean and enter the dwelling of the righteous.

But the story does not end there. The lepers cried out in agony and acted in faith. But only one returned to thank God. Jesus was more shocked by the lack of praise for God than he was impressed with the faith of the lepers. Indeed, he only recognised the faith of the one who returned.

If you have already welcomed Jesus as your saviour, I trust that you are in the habit of praying. I also trust that you are aware of your dependence on God in your daily life. We need God to sustain us in the little things and see us through the big things. It is therefore easy to get lost in requests in prayer. Requests not only to keep us safe in our day and grow us in our faith, but requests for our loved ones, the people around us and those who need our thoughts and our prayers. These are all good things to pray for. But we must not forget to turn around and thank Jesus for what he has done for us. We must praise God for who he is.

Percentage wise, how much time would you say do you devote of your daily prayers to thank God for who he is? Not only to thank him for what he has granted you, but just to praise him? To acknowledge his majesty and his sovereignty? How often do you stop to think about God's works and plans, only to reach the point of being overwhelmed by the infinite immensity of it all and then to fall down, giving praise to God?

Come now. Turn around, and run into the arms of love.

Critique

The talk was well received and the delivery was acceptable.

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Nothing was said to be "wrong" with the talk, but a couple of minor points for slight improvement were given. Firstly, I could have elaborated more on uncleanness and why it was necessary for unclean people to be excluded from the camp (because God was present amongst His people there). Secondly, I could have emphasised the point that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, as this was the apex of His purpose on earth: to be crucified there.

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