

**OCTOBER 12, 2025**

## **HOW HEALING HAPPENS**

*By Pr. Beate Chun*

### **When everything hurts**

Grace to you and peace  
from the one who was  
and the one who is  
and the one who is to come.

Two weeks ago, my friend Lina  
woke up with excruciating pain in her lower back.  
It was the kind of pain that takes over everything  
—you can't sit comfortably,  
you can't lie down,  
you can't find a position that brings relief.

She tried everything she could think of:  
ice packs, hot baths,  
stretching, gentle exercises  
—nothing worked.  
Every movement hurt.  
Every attempt to find comfort ended in frustration.

Finally, after days of trying  
to manage on her own,  
she was so depleted, so exhausted,  
that she went to see a doctor.  
When she came home afterward,

I asked her, “So, how did it go?”  
She was clearly disappointed.

She said, “Well, the doctor didn’t  
really even look at me.  
He didn’t examine me.  
He just asked a lot of questions  
while staring at the computer screen,  
and then he prescribed me painkillers.”

She took the medication for a few days.  
Of course, the painkillers did  
what they were supposed to do  
—they dulled the pain.  
But as soon as she slowed down  
or skipped a dose, the pain returned.  
Nothing had really improved,  
because the underlying issue hadn’t been addressed.

After several phone calls and a long wait,  
she managed to see the doctor again.  
Once more, he didn’t look at her,  
didn’t touch her back, didn’t really see her.  
He simply renewed her prescription,  
asked more questions, and sent her home.

This went on for some time until finally,  
out of sheer frustration,  
Lina insisted on a more thorough examination.  
She demanded to be truly seen.  
And after more testing and persistence,  
she finally received a potential diagnosis:  
bursitis of the hip—a very painful inflammation,  
but one that can be treated  
with anti-inflammatory medication  
or cortisone injections.

Now, with proper treatment,  
she’s slowly starting to feel better.

But through all those long weeks of pain and frustration,  
something became clear to me as we talked:

**When the body suffers, the whole person suffers.**

Pain is never just physical.  
It affects the body, the mind, and the spirit.

When we are in pain,  
we want more than a pill—  
we want someone to look at us,  
to care for us,  
to acknowledge our humanity.  
We want to be respected  
and treated as whole people,  
not just as medical cases or data on a screen.

And to be fair, we know that doctors today  
are under immense pressure  
—short appointment times,  
endless documentation requirements,  
overbooked schedules.  
Many of them want to give more personal care  
but are simply not allowed the time.

Still, when that personal attention is missing,  
when no one looks us in the eye,  
when no one listens with compassion, something vital is lost.

And that's where we come in  
—the friends, the family, the faith community.  
We cannot prescribe medicine,  
but we can offer something equally necessary:  
presence,  
listening,  
touch,  
prayer,  
love.

Healing happens not only through science  
but through the sacred ministry of human connection.  
Which brings us to our Gospel reading for today  
—Luke 17:11–19,  
the story of the ten who were healed of a skin disease.

## **The Ten with “Leprosy”**

Luke tells us that as Jesus was traveling  
along the border between Galilee and Samaria,  
he encountered ten people afflicted with what the Bible calls a “skin disease.”  
Older translations call it “leprosy,”  
but that’s not quite accurate.  
The term “leprosy” as we use it today  
refers specifically to Hansen’s disease,  
a chronic bacterial infection  
that affects the nerves and skin.  
But the Greek word *lepra* in the Bible  
simply meant any serious skin condition  
—something that altered the skin’s appearance.

So the ten people Jesus met could have suffered  
from all kinds of ailments:  
rashes, eczema, infections, discolorations.  
The important thing isn’t the exact diagnosis  
—it’s the social and spiritual consequences.

In the ancient world,  
any visible skin disease  
made a person ritually unclean.  
And ritual uncleanness didn’t mean moral failure  
—it simply meant separation.  
A person with such a condition  
had to live apart from the community,  
outside the village,  
unable to worship in the synagogue or temple.  
They were isolated, stigmatized,  
cut off from human touch and the life of faith.

This was the condition of the ten people  
whom Jesus met on the road.  
So imagine their loneliness.  
Not only were they in physical pain,  
but they also carried the pain of rejection.  
Their bodies and spirits were both wounded.

This reminds us of people who suffered from AIDS  
in the early 1980s, when the disease was barely understood.  
No one wanted to touch those who suffered.  
Even in hospitals, patients were often neglected.  
The stigma added an additional burden  
to the illnesses these patients faced.

## **Jesus the Healer**

But back to the ten people  
who suffered from skin disease.  
When they saw Jesus passing by,  
they called out from a distance,  
“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”  
They didn’t ask for money or food.  
They asked for mercy—  
for healing, for wholeness, for restoration.

And Jesus, without even touching them, said,  
“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

That might sound like a strange command  
—why send them to the priests before they were healed?  
But according to the law of Moses,  
when someone was cured of a skin disease,  
they had to be examined by a priest  
before being allowed back into the community.  
Only the priest could declare them officially “clean.”

So when Jesus told them to go,  
he was implying, “You are already healed.”

Go forth as though it were true.”  
And as they went, Luke says, they were made clean.

But here’s where the story turns.  
Of the ten, only one  
came back to give thanks—  
and that one was a Samaritan.

## **The Outsider Who Understood**

Now we have to know something  
about Samaritans.  
Samaria was the region located between Galilee in the north  
and Judea in the south.  
The Samaritans who lived there  
shared much of their ancestry and scripture  
with the Jewish people  
but differed in their belief  
that the true place to worship God  
was Mount Gerizim rather than the temple in Jerusalem.

Because of these differences,  
deep tensions had grown between Jews  
and Samaritans over the centuries—  
religious, cultural, and political divisions  
that often led to hostility and mutual avoidance.  
Jews, in particular, despised Samaritans,  
considering them outsiders, foreigners,  
people who didn’t worship “correctly.”

Now, when Jesus said, “Go show yourselves to the priests,”  
nine of them—who were Jewish—  
knew exactly where to go:  
to the temple in Jerusalem.

But the Samaritan? Where should he go?  
He had no temple in Jerusalem,  
no priest to certify him.

He was caught between identities,  
between systems, between worlds.

But that very uncertainty became a blessing.  
Because as he thought about where to go,  
it dawned on him that the One who had healed him—  
this wonderful and kind healer—  
was his priest, he was his temple.  
So he turned around,  
went back to Jesus,  
and fell at his feet,  
praising God and giving thanks.

## **Faith and Fullness of Healing**

And Jesus said to him,  
“Were not ten cleansed?  
Where are the nine?  
Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”  
Then he said to the man, “Get up and go.  
Your faith has made you well.”

At first glance, we might think,  
“Wait a minute—I thought Jesus healed all of them?”  
Yes, and no.  
All ten had received the gift of a clean skin,  
they all received an outward healing.  
But healing, true healing, is so much more  
than a removal of the symptoms.  
True healing is a healing of body,  
mind, and spirit,  
what the Bible calls salvation.

A person can have a body that is cured,  
and still suffer from trauma and anxiety.  
On the other hand,  
I have known persons  
who live with great afflictions  
and yet have found wholeness in their being.

Some I have known personally,  
and some I have read or heard about.  
For example, Stephen Hawking,  
who was paralyzed by ALS  
and unable to speak without a machine,  
yet he expanded our understanding  
of the universe with brilliance and humor  
that inspired millions.

Or the painter Frida Kahlo,  
who suffered a devastating bus accident as a young woman  
and lived with lifelong pain.  
Yet she transformed her suffering  
into the most astounding paintings,  
vivid, raw, and full of life.

These stories remind us that healing  
does not always mean the restoration of the body,  
and wholeness is not the same as physical perfection.

Sometimes, it is precisely through weakness,  
limitation, and suffering  
that the fullness of life  
and the radiance of the human spirit  
are most clearly revealed.

## **Our Part in the Healing**

All ten sufferers received physical healing.  
But one of them—a Samaritan—  
ended up with something deeper.  
He was healed not only in body but in spirit.  
He experienced salvation.

This is where the story speaks to us today.  
Because in our modern world,  
we have made extraordinary progress  
in treating the body.  
We have advanced medicine,  
powerful drugs, high-tech surgeries.

And yet, many people still feel unseen,  
unheard, spiritually unwell.

True healing—the kind that Jesus offers—  
can and does happen  
even when no cure is available.  
The pain doesn't always go away,  
but peace enters the heart.

And we, as followers of Jesus,  
are invited to be agents of this deeper healing.  
When someone is sick, yes, we pray for them.  
But we can also show up for them.  
Be present, listen,  
sing a hymn, hold a hand.  
Those small acts of love minister to the spirit,  
and that ministry of presence is a form of healing,  
sometimes the most important form of healing.

And if we are the ones who are suffering,  
there is one powerful thing we can do  
for our own spirit: we can give thanks.  
We can turn to Jesus and give thanks,  
the way the Samaritan gave thanks.

It may sound paradoxical,  
but giving thanks in times of suffering  
is one of the most healing acts of faith  
we can perform.  
It shifts our focus from what is broken  
to what is still whole,  
from what is absent to what remains,  
from despair to hope.

The old form for the liturgy of Holy Communion  
begins with these words:

“It is indeed right and salutary  
that we should at all times and in all places  
offer thanks and praise to God.”

“Right and salutary.”

That old-fashioned word *salutary* comes  
from the same root as salvation.

It means healing.

It is healing to give thanks.

It is good for the soul.

When we practice gratitude

—even when it is hard,  
even when pain still lingers—

we open ourselves to grace.

So maybe your back hurts,  
or you’re weighed down by worry,  
or you’re lonely or grieving.

Still, try to find one small thing to thank God for:

the song of a bird outside your window,

the warmth of the morning sun,

the kindness of a friend,

the steady presence of God who has not abandoned you.

That act of giving thanks—

like the Samaritan who turned back—

connects us to the source of your healing.

## **Conclusion**

The story of the ten healed

and the one who gave thanks

is about gratitude

and about recognizing where our wholeness comes from.

Wholeness comes from a life lived with gratitude,

where we give thanks to God

at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances.

**Amen.**

**Sermon for Sunday, October, 12, 2025**  
**18. Sunday after Pentecost (Year C)**

**Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco**

**The Text: [Luke 17:11-19 NRSVue - Jesus Cleanses Ten Men with a Skin - Bible Gateway](#)**

Tags: Healing | Wholeness | Gratitude | Luke 17:11-19 | 18. Sunday after Pentecost Year C