

In our gospel story today Jesus encounters ten lepers.

QUESTION? Lepers are people who have leprosy – which is a flesh-eating disease. It gives you open wounds all over your body and parts of your body might be eaten away. It looks pretty grim and, in Jesus' time, it was thought to be very contagious/ easy to catch.

So lepers had to stay away from other people permanently and they were forced to live out in the open countryside or in caves away from their family and friends. It was a very lonely existence.

Imagine all the things you'd miss out on today if you had to live alone and away from your friends and family.

Anyway, these ten lepers had heard that Jesus was travelling through their countryside and they'd also heard that he could heal people.

So they realised that this was their one chance to be healed and allowed back into the community and normal family living. And they were going to take it!

So they came and stood a little distance away from Jesus and called to him to help them. "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on us." And all Jesus said to them was: "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

Why does he say that? Because only the priests could decide whether or not they were cured and whether or not they could be allowed back into the community.

So the lepers set off to the temple to find the priests and on their way they're cured.

Ten men healed from this awful disease that eats away at the skin and the flesh of the body; healed so they can come back to the town and live a normal family life again. Wow – that must have been amazing! Completely life changing for them.....

And yet – only one of the ten actually goes back to say Thank you to Jesus. As Jesus is disappointed “where are the other nine?” he says.

I wonder why they didn't go back... You'd have thought they'd have been so grateful to Jesus for giving them their lives back that they'd have been desperate to go and say thank you.

I wonder why they didn't? I wonder what excuses they might give? Or what excuses we might give nowadays if we'd been healed?

Talk in your families ---- about what excuse you might make?

I was desperate to see my family.....

I wanted to organise a party to celebrate with my friends.....

I wanted to go shopping to replace these filthy ragged clothes.....

I wanted to go to a restaurant for some proper food.....

I wanted to go and find my friends.....

I wanted to watch a football match again....

I wanted a mobile phone that I'd heard everyone has now....

I wanted to go to the theatre/ cinema/ pub

So many possible excuses – and we might say that some of them were pretty poor excuses.....

Though I think very high up on my agenda would be going and telling the family that I was cured.... so we could celebrate together.

And the thing is that sometimes **we** forget to say thank you for the good things God gives to us... **we** take his wonderful gifts for granted!

(ask what kind of things we want to say thank you for....)

Things like our own health, our families and friends, our homes and hot and cold running water, our schools, our education and our jobs, our transport, our hospitals, the food we eat, the facilities we have for cooking, the fact that there is always food in our shops.... Our National Health service

For many years now at **Harvest time** people have **wanted** to gather together to say Thank you to God for a good harvest because a good harvest meant they'd have enough food for the next 12 months. A poor harvest would mean they'd starve.

Nowadays in Ongar maybe only a few of us grow our own food and there's probably never been a time when we've been without food. But **HARVEST is an opportunity to** remind us how **lucky** we are not to have to worry about these things, lucky in so many ways that we may forget. Lucky - very lucky – to have our health, particularly in these strange Covid times.

So today we're showing our Thanks to God by **bringing** foods and toiletries to help those who don't have enough of their own and who have to rely on the local FoodBank. And in a little while Jane will bless both the goods we have brought, and we who have brought them, and those who will receive them.

But before we do that we're going to spend a little time in mindfulness.... In experiencing right now some of the gifts God gives to us that we might sometimes take for granted...

We're going to use our different senses – sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste – to remind us of all the gifts that are all around us every day – and to say thank you for them.

And that will lead us into a time of thanksgiving in prayer.....

So first I want you to settle yourselves comfortably and close your eyes and just be still.

And **listen** to what sounds you can hear..... birdsong? The wind rustling the leaves and branches on the trees? Traffic on the roads... or is there the beautiful sound of silence itself?

And while you still have your eyes closed just check out what you can **feel** either in the air itself or what you can touch around you on the ground or on your picnic blanket...

Now open your eyes again What beautiful things do you **see** around you? Flowers? Grass? Fields? Trees? The familiar faces of Friends and Family?

What can you **smell**? Breathing in the fresh air? ... Things you've brought to eat for lunch?

Now open your bag – and you'll find in it three things that you can **taste**..... I'd suggest either eating the little piece of rock – have a look at what it says on it..... or the heart-shaped chocolate....

PRAYER

So now we come to our time of prayer..... and in your bag as well you'll find various pieces of paper and card, all in the shape of a heart, and a pen And you can write or draw on the paper/card some of the different things you'd like to say Thank you to God for. Use as many of the pieces of card/ paper as you like. Let your prayers of thanks come from your HEART.

Then place your prayers at the edge of your blanket and Jane and I will come round and offer them up to God in thanksgiving. And then eventually we're going to display them on a cork board in St Martin's.