

## **Readings for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

12<sup>th</sup> October 2025

### First Reading: Jeremiah 29:1,4-7

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

### Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

### Gospel: St Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to Samaritan, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

## **A Reflection for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Earlier this week, I heard that my headteacher from high school days has died. She was 95. A good teacher or headteacher makes a difference in the lives of many young people, even if that is not recognised until much later on in life. As one comment I read said, good teachers believe in others, especially those who struggle, and have confidence in their pupils' abilities until they have the confidence to believe in themselves. Her death has made me

think back to my schooldays and those who then, and at other times, have made a difference in my life, and to remember them with gratitude. Maybe you can think of similar people who have made a difference in your life.

Unfortunately, and for many reasons, we don't always get around to thanking those who have helped us along our way, something that comes through in today's Gospel reading.

As I am sure you know, in Jesus' day, lepers were outcasts. Their disease was not understood, untreatable and viewed with fear. The book of Leviticus, among the books of the Law in the Old Testament, has two whole chapters on the disease. The Law required that lepers were cut off from others, banished to live outside the villages, isolated from society and required to keep their distance, calling out 'unclean, unclean' if people came near.

In this account, we are told that Jesus encountered ten lepers as he came to a village – he must still have been outside the village as the lepers were not allowed in. The lepers kept their distance, as required, but instead of calling out 'unclean, unclean', they say 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.' What are they looking for? They don't ask for healing; they ask for mercy. They know his name - have they heard of Jesus' healing miracles or is it simply a request for food?

Jesus engaged with the lepers; we're told he 'saw them', he didn't avert his eyes, pretending not to see, and hurry on by, as many of us might do. But there are no words of healing; instead, he sends them on a journey to the priests, the only people who could declare them clean and end their isolation. As this passage tells us, Jesus met the lepers roughly on the border between Galilee and Samaria and he told them to go and show themselves to the priests who would have been in or around Jerusalem. Galilee was in the north, Jerusalem in the south, with Samaria in between, so to go to the priests would have meant a journey of the order of sixty miles on foot. It was quite an ask, yet they went. Desperate perhaps, so they would try anything, or maybe there was something about Jesus that they trusted him and were prepared to do this. Possibly a bit of both.

'As they went, they were made clean.' When did they realise they had been healed? Did it happen simultaneously? What did they say to one another? We don't know, but we do know that one of them, realising that he had been healed, was overwhelmed with gratitude and turned back, praising God. He recognised that the source of healing, of wholeness and goodness, is back with Jesus.

'And he was a Samaritan'. This is a story that shows gratitude in an unlikely place, at least for the Gospel's original audience. This man was a double outcast in Jewish society, as a leper and as a Samaritan, for all Samaritans were seen as social outcasts and religious heretics. He was not the one who would have been expected to do the right thing. Gratitude is a foundational virtue in Judaism, so here it was all the more ironic that it was the Samaritan who returned to give thanks.

This story shows that God's mercy is for all people, not just those like us, not just the religious in-crowd. What about the other nine? As Jesus asked, 'were not ten made clean?' We don't know; perhaps they made it to the priests in Jerusalem. But let us not be too quick to judge them. We all find it easy to plead for God's mercy when things are difficult, but are less quick to give credit to God for the good things that happen in our lives. There is a very human story in that respect.

We live in a society that is often characterised by materialism and individualism. It is all too easy to think that the benefits we enjoy in life are the product of our own efforts and to forget, even if temporarily, that it is God on whom we depend, it is God who provides for us, cares for us and nurtures us. Yet, despite our humanness, our frequent

taking for granted of God's goodness and mercy towards us, God continues to offer us the healing that is more than physical.

That is not to say that we don't face hardships, for we all do. There are times when we all get ill, when we may lack the necessities of life, or love and companionship, when we succumb to the fear and distrust that separates us from others, or we suffer despair and lose sight of God. The lepers faced such hardships and, even after they were healed, I don't suppose that their lives were all a bed of roses. The Samaritan who returned to Jesus would still have been an outsider in society due to his ethnicity.

Our other readings today remind us that, even in times of hardship, there are reasons to be grateful. Jeremiah was addressing people in exile from their homeland. Through him, having previously told the exiles that this was not for ever and they would return, God tells them to enjoy their lives and to seek the welfare of the place they were in for the time being. That is, to be grateful for all the good things they do have: homes, gardens producing food, families. And Paul, writing to Timothy from prison and 'chained like a criminal', nevertheless gives thanks for the freedom of the Gospel message of salvation which gives him the strength to endure.

When I was a child and was denied something that I wanted, my mother would sometimes say 'count your blessings'. At the time, it annoyed me intensely, but she was right. Psychologists also tell us that gratitude is good for us. Apparently, among the benefits are improved mental and physical wellbeing, less stress, better sleep, stronger relationships, positive emotions and greater relaxation. God designed us well! Gratitude doesn't expect life to be perfect, nor does it ignore what is hard and burdensome, but it has the humility to look for what is good in our lives and give thanks to God for the gifts we have received.

And gratitude, giving thanks is an important part of our worship together. The word 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'. As we come to worship, praise and give thanks to God, whether for a teacher or someone in our past who has helped us, or for the good gifts we enjoy in life today, or for the beauty of the place in which we live, so God draws near to us to heal and restore us.