

Jesus challenges the distinction between the in-crowd and the untouchables

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Pentecost + 18 C – Jrm 29 1 & 4-7, Ps 66 1-11, 2 Tim 2 8-15,
Lk 17 11-19

Kids: *10 in bed* song. Each one fell out, and the song doesn't say what happens to them afterwards. Today, we heard a story about 10 people who had something much worse happen to them than fall out of bed. They had nasty sores on their skin and back then, it meant they couldn't live with their families or hang around with their friends. They weren't even allowed to live in their villages. They camped outside the village, just with each other for company. They were very sad; it wasn't their fault they were sick.

One day, they saw Jesus. They'd heard of him, and they were sure he could help them. So, they called out to him; they asked him to be kind to them. And he gave a strange answer. He said, 'Go and show yourself to the priests.' Maybe you don't know, but back then, if the priests saw your skin sores were better, they'd say you could go back home.

I wonder what could Jesus mean; 'Go and show yourself to the priests.'? Maybe they wondered too. Maybe on the way to visit the priests, they checked under their bandages. Can you guess what they saw?

They were better! They were all well again! How wonderful! The priests would tell them they could go home to their families. They couldn't wait! They hurried away to see the priests.

But not all of them hurry away. One of them remembers

something. This one remembers asking Jesus to be kind. He remembers that Jesus told him to go to the priests. Jesus must have made him better—it must have been because of Jesus that he'd be able to go home. He was so grateful; he ran back to Jesus straight away to say thank you.

Isn't it good that this man came back! Because of him, we know that all ten of them were okay. And I'm sure he told lots of other people what Jesus did for him. So, because he did that, we've found out that Jesus cares for us too.

It's really important to tell people that Jesus cares for us. So, I've brought some band-aids to share, to help us remember to tell everyone this story too.

Adults: Remember the pandemic – how we had to avoid each other? It was a time where some people were in particular danger – elderly and sick people – and they were protected from everyone else. And remember how we had to isolate when it was possible that we'd had contact with 'a case' – how we might have been dangerous? And remember the closed borders – state and national – and the things that were said about people who ignored those rules and crossed borders anyway – how angrily they were treated? Overall, it's an experience that's left people with mental and physical scars.

For many of us, the pandemic time has given us a taste of the type of taboos that there were in Jesus' time. There were people back then who you couldn't associate with, because contact or proximity with them made you ritually unclean. And when you were unclean, you couldn't join in any religious ceremonies. You might pass on your contamination to other worshippers; so, you were an outcast. You had to self-isolate and go through lots of hoops before the priests might declare that you were clean again.

So maybe we can see for the first time what a shock it was for many people that Jesus spent time with the sort of people he

did. The Jesus we meet in today's story is very like those pandemic border-crossers that everyone reviled. He often shocked the rule-keepers. But the outsiders – the people who had to permanently self-isolate; the ones who were told they couldn't belong – Jesus went out to these people all the time; and they flocked to him too. Can you imagine their relief; their happiness; how thankful they'd have been? It's good that we can imagine that now, because it reminds us what his coming has done for each of us too. He's come to us full of love and welcome whether we feel deserving of it or not, and whether others think we're deserving or not.

Today, Jesus met ten acknowledged outsiders in an in-between, liminal place – between village and wilderness, between Galilee and what was for Jews the foreign country of Samaria; an in-between place inhabited by people who didn't belong. Jesus didn't keep himself *pure* with the in-crowd. He went out – out to places where distinctions between insiders and outsiders caused great pain. The disease these ten suffered from meant they didn't belong anywhere inside; only with other outsiders; all shunned together.

Try to think of people in that situation in Australia; who comes to mind for you?

Going out to liminal places, crossing those borders, ignoring protocols and shocking the arbiters of right and wrong, Jesus is saying that for him, making a distinction between insiders and outsiders isn't right. All the way through the gospels, we see Jesus challenging the distinction between the in-crowd and the untouchables.

We're his followers – so that's what we're meant to be like too – a community where such distinctions don't count; a people who challenge our society when it exiles people.

And that's a stance we find supported in our reading from Jeremiah today too. The message he wrote to the Jewish exiles

in Babylon – to settle, marry, build and have families – wasn't just meant to benefit them. Babylon was also meant to benefit from their Jewish slaves living in ways that worked for the welfare of the city. God's blessing doesn't recognise borders – it goes across them and surprises foreigners and outsiders with love and blessings which are showered on all alike.

So Jesus didn't sit in the temple or a synagogue rearranging things and making them more user-friendly in the hope that a casual by-passer might drop in and feel comfortable enough to stay. There were people who couldn't come. He went out to where these people were and loved them into belonging. He loved them where they were, and he loved them just as he found them; even outcasts whom no-one else would go near. That challenges us if we think hanging around here making things more user-friendly in the hope that people will come and stay – if that's what God wants from us.

I need us all to do a bit of homework this week. Could you please pray all week—the biggest prayer you can – about the best ways this parish can possibly show Jesus' outgoing, outreaching, dangerously compassionate kind of love to the people who live around here? This prayer will grow and change during the week. When you believe it's quite clear – that it's a prayer that lots of people in the parish could pray with you – could you please write it down, and bring a copy to put in the offering bowl over the next few Sundays.

God be with us as we pray; guide us; hold us; and help us know how to share your love with people who don't know it yet – that these too may know your love. Amen