

### **Luke 17:11-19**

*Jesus sends ten men with a skin disease to show themselves to the priests and they are healed as they go, but only one, a Samaritan, returns to give thanks.*

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 him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

If the Church is to retain any prophetic voice in our current era, it must relearn the radical inclusivity of Christ. Contrary to the 'popular' version of the 'Gospel' that makes Christianity an exclusive enclave for those who have prayed the right prayer, or who agree to the right theological ideas, the faith of those who follow Christ must be one that opens its arms to all others. This means that we need to move from a process that goes from believing to behaving to belonging, to the reverse process of offering belonging first (with no strings attached), and then allowing our relationships to influence behaving and ultimately lead to faith – or believing. We need to become indiscriminate about who we serve, love, give to, include and bless. We must refuse to judge or disassociate from others on the basis of any false distinctions. We can no longer allow a word like 'Muslim' to become an insult, but must rather honour those who follow this faith with sincerity and commitment. We can no longer allow our faith to lead us into arrogance, dominance, exploitation or dismissal of others. This means that in every community, we cannot avoid making ourselves at home among those whom we would naturally avoid. What this means for your Church will be recognised very quickly when you identify those who are missing from your Sunday gatherings, but whom you can't help but notice as you pass them on the street during the week. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

### **COCU60C Readings**

This week the theme could be called "The Liberated Gospel"! The thread running through all of the readings is about "outsiders" being included in God's grace and among God's people - or of God's people making themselves at home with those with whom they would normally not have associated. Jeremiah encourages the exiles to settle in Babylon. The Psalmist calls all the earth and all people to join in the praise of God. Jesus heals a group of men with skin diseases, including a despised Samaritan, and only the 'outsider' Samaritan returns to give thanks. And Paul celebrates the Gospel that is not imprisoned, but, through God's faithfulness is available to all. It's a week to celebrate the indiscriminate, all-encompassing love, grace and life of God, and to hear the call to live this radical inclusivity in our times and circumstances.

As author Brian McLaren notes in his book *A New Kind Of Christianity*, we live in a world where religious conflict threatens the peace and survival of the entire planet, and in which militaristic radicals have the weaponry to destroy us all. In such a world, religious exclusivity and finger-pointing is more than just an act of immaturity – it is a very dangerous way to live. In the midst of this we are challenged by a Jesus who was scandalously inclusive. The only ones who were shut out of Jesus' embrace, were (and are) those who choose to exclude themselves – and even they continue to be loved and accepted by God. In a world where we define ourselves according to nationality, race, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, educational level, language and so much more – and use these distinction to justify everything from killing to exploitation, from stereotyping to the threat of hell – we desperately need those who will bravely follow Christ in the act of making outsiders insiders, and embracing even the ones we most struggle to love. This is not just an act of personal spiritual obedience. It is a world-changing commitment that has economic, political, environmental, and even medical consequences. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

### **Psalm 66:1-12**

*A call for all the earth to praise the God who rules over all, and for all nations to bless God.*

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;  
**sing the glory of God's name; give to God glorious praise.**

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!  
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.  
All the earth worships you;  
they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Selah

**Come and see what God has done:  
God is awesome in deeds among mortals.**

God turned the sea into dry land;  
they passed through the river on foot.  
There we rejoiced in God, who rules by might forever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations  
- let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah  
**Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,  
who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.**

For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.  
You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let  
people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;  
**yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

### **Jeremiah 29:1,4-7**

*Jeremiah encourages the exiles in Babylon to settle into their new country, to build homes and lives there among the Babylonian people and to work for the prosperity of their new land.*

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. The letter said: 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.

### **2 Timothy 2:8-15**

*Paul is imprisoned for preaching the Gospel of Christ's resurrection, but the Gospel itself is not imprisoned. God offers life to those who die with Christ, and God remains always faithful, which is why Paul encourages Timothy to remind people of these things and to continue to serve and teach faithfully.*

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.