

It can seem that a place like this – ancient, established, solid, beautiful - is at the very centre of Christian faith, the safe core of our believing. In fact, as Salley Vickers, the author, spoke about so eloquently last night, Beverley Minster and Chartres Cathedral, and others, can also be places where people on the edge of society and people in the uncertainty of doubt and disbelief find hope and security and life. Here, as the kingdom of God meets the kingdom of this world, we can be, we should be, edge dwellers, welcoming people who are in darkness and light, faith and doubt, if only we know how to greet them.

Our Gospel reading is all about edges and boundaries and borderlands. Leprosy was as devastating in Jesus' day as it is today, even if the Biblical definition included a host of other skin diseases. Leprosy banished people, confined them to the edge, and thus bound them together. Perhaps that is why we meet a group in this story who would otherwise hate each other on sight: Jews and Samaritans. Their differences were religious - and no differences go as deep. But, 'keeping their distance' from everyone else, they live on the edge and find a security in each other. Jesus enters their world, and from the margins of 'normal' society teaches us much of what it is to have our life saved, and to find his salvation.

We learn a lot about ourselves here. A story which might seem so alien, another world, is actually about our own. Firstly we learn about **healing**. In the Gospels Jesus's healings are never recounted the same way twice! Think about it. Jesus sometimes spits on people, sometimes lays hands on people, sometimes just says it has been done, sometimes has two goes. Here he does something remarkable - he tells the lepers to go away *as if* they had been healed. You should only go to the priest if you wanted to be pronounced clean, to have your healing verified. Jesus preserves their dignity by making no effort to close the gap between him and them - he affirms their edgy community. But he recognises their need, and just says - 'off you go' - *as if* they were clean... And they, on the edge, have to learn to take an edgy, a faithful decision.

Mark 11:24 'whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours'. In solidarity with each other, all ten have faith, because all ten, who could have said 'heal us properly, prove that we are clean', actually do what Jesus says, and find that their faith is rewarded with healing. We can learn from this....hear the words of Christ to us on the edge, pray and believe - *as if* we have received...

Secondly, we learn about the nature of **saving faith**. Now, Luke rarely repeats himself, and there has been a story of the healing of a leper in Chapter five. Something more is going on. Just because God does something fantastic in your life doesn't mean you haven't got any more to do...One leper interrupts his journey to being pronounced physically clean to give thanks to Jesus. The story makes it clear that this action takes him further on his road to discipleship and having his whole life saved. Ten lepers are made clean, only one is made whole.

This is a story about going beyond the physical, the needs of the here and now, to the eternal, the vital, the relationship between ourselves and our God. The tenth leper recognises that his healing was God's gift, not his right, and he gives praise in humility where it is due. Jesus recognises that his faith is deep, and proclaims salvation (wholeness is the same word in Greek). And the remarkable thing is that this man is a Samaritan. The one who was most on the edge is the one who finds himself thoroughly enveloped in the saving love of God.

There is a lesson here for us in the edgy and complicated nature of our lives. Surveys show that the majority of people have had some spiritual experience which they can point to and which was huge for them. The same surveys indicate that for many, that was the end of the story. Most will live decent, clean and upright lives, but that will be the end of it. Nine lepers showed religious faith, were touched by God, and rejoiced. But we don't know what became of them.

Many of us will have been touched by God, but God's grace leaves us with a choice: do we respond by giving God the whole of our lives, or do we take the money and run? The leper was given all he wanted. He gave it back in gratitude to God, and was given more than he could imagine. I learn two things from this. I should not be surprised at people who gain much from God, but don't make it to full Christian faith (Jesus had a ten per cent success rate!). And I should not be surprised to find that someone can make it from devastation to wholeness. If a Samaritan leper could, then anyone can.

It is, of course, not for us to judge what these lepers do with their experience. I trust that all of them, as they heard what happened to Jesus, came to see that their physical healing was an external version of what his love could do with the whole of their being. The tenth leper got a head start on them, and learnt to relate his cleansing to his salvation. Jesus saves people's lives here, and it takes us, and them, a lifetime to recognise and to discover it.

It is amazing how many people feel on the edge – within their workplaces, families, friendship groups, churches. Be assured. The edge, the borderland, is where Jesus operates. It is where the love of God is discovered. It is where great wrongs are confessed and forgiven. It is where leaps of faith are made. And it is where our lives are saved. Today may be a time to reach out a hand to find salvation, or to offer it. In Christ, we can go on our way. Our faith in him will save us.