

met him, men who stood afar off. "They raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." "Catching sight of them, he said, "Go! Show yourselves to the priests." As they went, it so happened that they were healed. "One of them, seeing he was healed, turned back with a shout, glorifying God, "and fell on his face at [Jesus'] feet, giving him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. "Answering, Jesus said, "Weren't there ten cleansed? Where are the nine? "Didn't anyone come back to give God glory except this 'alien'?" "So, he said to him, "Get up and go! Your faith has made you whole." (Lk. 17:11-19)

Let us review exegetical matters. In v. 11, Luke has Jesus wandering through the borderland between Samaria and Galilee, a DMZ, which as "no man's land" was a place to dump contagious persons. What we label leprosy, namely, Hansen's disease, was probably unknown in Jesus' day. Therefore, in the Bible the word "leprosy" probably referred to some other highly contagious skin eruption. Verse 12 reports that the men "stood afar off," which was required by Levitical law. (Chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus will be studied by preachers who plan to preach Luke's passage.) When in v. 14 we have mention of Jesus "catching sight of them," Luke probably means that Jesus saw their skin disfigurement. The imperious "Go!" in v. 14 is punctuated so as to separate it from a following explanatory clause, "Show yourselves to the priests." Presumably, a Samaritan would trundle off to Mount Gerizim, whereas Jewish lepers would journey to Jerusalem. Notice the casual use of a favorite Lukan phrase, "It so happened . . .," in reference to the healing. In vv. 15-16 we get a most unusual conjunction of terms—*doxazon* = glorifying, *euchariston* = thanking—both specific terms for worship in Luke and among early Christians. While the words could be used descriptively, more likely they are Luke's way of drawing Christian worship into the story. Incidentally, there may be theological precision involved in the verse: God is glorified and Christ is thanked. The use of "Samaritan" in v. 16 is probably symbolic; Luke probably means "Gentile." In v. 17 we have more than a touch of irony: "Weren't there ten? What happened to the nine?" Rather obviously (without speculating motives), the nine were off doing the law. In v. 19, some translations have "Your faith has healed you," but we suggest that "whole" is preferable. So much for some brief exegetical information.

One of the problems with Luke 17:11-19 is that the passage seems to suggest too many motifs. Certainly, lepers were outcasts; quite literally, they were cast out. As many scholars have noticed, the miracle stories are, in most cases, stories of liberation from social, religious, or natural oppression. There is also a Jew/Gentile theme which is underscored by Luke's aside, "And he was a Samaritan." In addition, we sense a dialectic between doing the law and returning to worship, which seems to emerge in the structure of the text. In

view of the fact that prior to vv. 11-19 Luke has told the little parable of the Modest Servant, which would appear to be a call to doing the Lord's work obediently, the dialectic of law vs. worship is somewhat puzzling. What are we to make of such a mishmash of thematic? The passage is intentionally designed, but we seem to have more intentions than we can handle.

Normally, preachers will do a simple structural analysis of the text before they turn to exegetical study involving commentaries or other reference works on biblical background. We can at least grasp the story line of the passage in a sketchy fashion. Most New Testament pericopes, particularly the miracles, are framed with an introduction and a conclusion. Verse 11 is introductory—it merely locates the story, and is not part of the action. The narrative can be listed as follows:

1. Lepers: "Have pity on us!"
2. Jesus' command: "Go! Show yourselves to the priests."
3. They go and, "it so happened," are healed.
4. One of them returns, glorifying and thanking.
5. Jesus: "Where are the nine?"
6. "Your faith has made you whole."

In listing the passage, we have not included the motif of social liberation simply because it is not *structurally* featured by Luke and, therefore, may be regarded as a secondary intention. Likewise, we have skipped the Lukan phrase, "And he was a Samaritan," precisely because it appears in the passage as a rhetorical aside. Again, we may be dealing with a secondary intention that is not structurally central to the movement of the passage.

### Homiletic Analysis

At this point in sermon preparation, ministers may wish to analyze each component part of the text's structure to get at theological understandings, analogues of experience, as well as a preliminary reading of roadblocks to understanding which may be within the congregational mind. Our analysis might proceed in the following manner:

1. Lepers: "Have pity on us!"
  - a. *Theology*: Here we have the universal cry of a wits'-end humanity to Jesus, who is understood by Luke to be God-with-us.
  - b. *Analogies of Experience*: Most of us have moments when, in desperate need, we call on God—overtly or covertly. Perhaps, when faced with a serious illness, or the dissolution of a marriage, or an impending death, or when our children are in jeopardy, we cry out to God. We may also imagine hordes of famine-ridden Africans reaching out skeletal hands: "Have pity!"

2 / STRUCTURES

c. *Congregational Blocks*: None.

2. Jesus' command: "Go! Show yourselves to the priests."

a. *Theology*: We should be shocked by the abrupt command. Jesus has flunked Pastoral Care 101: Surely, he should have said something like, "It must be difficult being a leper. . . ." Instead, we get a hard-line command, "Go!" Luke is presenting an imperious Lord Jesus Christ who, as God-with-us, has authority.

b. *Analogies of Experience*: Analogies of experience are difficult to get at in an age as secular as ours. Again and again, however, our cries for pity do seem to be answered by commands of God. The saints tell us that when they have hustled up to God, filled with personal pathos, God has often answered with "Go!" "Love!" "Serve!"

c. *Congregational Blocks*: Popular piety has painted a picture of caring Jesus, who, when we pray in desperate need, responds with warm support. Jesus' abrupt command may be unexpected and quite inexplicable.

3. They go and, "it so happened," are healed.

a. *Theology*: Whenever a command of Jesus is answered by an instant doing of the command, the New Testament is probably representing what might be termed "the obedience of faith." Insofar as the command involves Levitical regulation, we may describe the lepers as "faith doing the law." In either case, here, obedience = faith.

b. *Analogies of Experience*: As children, do we not do parental commands because we trust the commanders?

c. *Congregational Blocks*: We may run into problems in understanding. Members of the congregation may think of faith as either believing certain God-ideas or as a warm-tub God-feeling inside. People resist thinking of faith as doing the words of Jesus because such a notion seems to smack of authoritarianism.

4. One of them returns, glorifying and thanking.

a. *Theology*: We have already noticed the two words *doxazon* and *euchariston* featured in the text, both of which are Lukan words for worship. Thus, we may suppose that the verse represents Christian worship. Luther once supplied a single-sentence definition of worship: "The tenth leper turning back." Christian worship is, in essence, thanksgiving for God's saving love in Jesus Christ.

b. *Analogies of Experience*: While basic experiences of gratitude, particularly for healing, may inform the text, specific analogies should center on *worship as gratitude*—that is, singing doxological hymns, celebrating Eucharist, and so on.

c. *Congregational Blocks*: Blocks may be of two sorts. Some folk may think of thankfulness as an obligation, a kind of requisite etiquette toward God.

Others may have little experience in worship as thanksgiving, having grown up with either legal or didactic understandings of worship.

5. Jesus: "Where are the nine?"

a. *Theology*: We may not answer the question by guessing motivations or psychological deficiencies. Nor may we answer the question by historical reconstruction; the story makes no sense historically—Why would Jesus rebuke lepers for doing a commandment which he himself commanded? The question can only be answered within a theological structure: The nine did not return because they were doing the law.

b. *Analogies of Experience*: We have all met religious people who have reduced their lives with God to a list of "dos" and "don'ts." They seem to relate not to God but to law. Seeing such patterns in others may help us to spot the same tendencies in ourselves.

c. *Congregational Blocks*: Except for the basic illogic of the story, probably none.

6. "Your faith has made you whole."

a. *Theology*: We know that the New Testament does not embrace a faith-healing theology: Faith does not heal, God does. What is more, faith is not necessarily a requisite for healing, because God frequently seems to heal unbelievers. Instead, Luke may be referring to the "wholeness" of a Christian life which will include *both* obedience and worship. In Luke 17:11-19 we seem to have not only obedience but also worship. Together they comprise the "wholeness" of Christian faith.

b. *Analogies of Experience*: The dialectic of worship vs. social action (and its reverse, social action vs. worship) is a live issue in most churches. Obedience without worship can produce moralism, including the moralism of the social activist. On the other hand, worship without obedience can turn into a sick Pietism.

c. *Congregational Blocks*: Probably none.

What is taking place in our analysis is the forming of a structure of understanding in consciousness from which a sermon design may emerge. The analysis locates a theological field, forms contemporary meaning by analogy, and begins to spot intentional strategies with regard to a congregation. Of course, actual analogies of experience will be much more concrete as preachers explore their own lived experience as well as their particular range of social experiences. The kind of analysis we are proposing can be done with any biblical passage and, *invariably*, will assist preaching.

A Basic Structure

We have previously described homiletic design as the breaking of a whole pattern of meaning in consciousness into some sort of plotted sequence. In

studying Luke 17:11-19 we have ended up with a *story* in consciousness, but not merely a story: we have put together a story with *theological structures* of meaning and with *analogies of understanding* drawn from common experience. So, we see *through* a story to theological structure, and *through* theological structure to fields of human experience. Moreover, we have spotted intentions in the passage and, in particular, one intention that was displayed in the moving plot of the story, namely, an adding of worship to the obedience of faith. To Luke worship is *doxazon* and *euchariston*. What does the passage intend to do? It intends to call us to worship and thus form Christian "wholeness."

Are we bound by the intending of the passage? Though Luke may be putting down legal obedience in favor of a relating to God-in-Christ through worship, are we stuck with a similar agendum? Our situation may be quite different. Back in the 1960s an odd collision of Barthian theology and social protest may have produced a kind of radical social activist moralism in churches. In the 1970s, however, the pendulum swung toward romantic Pietism, a "spirituality" of relating to God that bracketed out most social protest. If we go with Luke's intending *to do*, will we not end up, inadvertently, endorsing an agendum of the seventies? So we may wish to keep obedience and worship in balance a bit more than Luke lest, in a new context, the passage be heard as a sharp putting down of doing the gospel.

Let us look at a possible basic structure of moves for a narrative sermon on Luke 17:11-19:

1. The lepers cried "Have pity!" and we can understand.
2. How does Jesus answer? With a commandment, "Go!" Isn't that just like God?
3. Well, they went: Faith is doing the word of Jesus Christ.
4. But if faith is only obedience, it can turn into dead law.
5. One came back to worship: Christian worship gives thanks.
6. So the Christian life is both obedient faith *and* worship.

In designing a sermon plot, in general we have followed the movement of the story in Luke (which, in a reflective treatment, might not occur). We have, however, switched the sequence of the text to some degree. In the passage the lepers go, then one returns, and then Jesus asks about the other nine. Instead, we move from the lepers obeying, to the failure of nine to return, and then pick up the one worshipping leper, prior to concluding with a discussion of "wholeness." Why have we made the change in sequence? If we followed the original plot, we would have ended up with rather nervous point-of-view shifts—looking at the lepers, then looking at the one worshiper,

then looking back to the lepers again. Moreover, by making a change in order we will be able to give worship climactic emphasis as well as to relate worship more easily to the theme of Christian "wholeness." There are probably other ways to plot a sermon from Luke's story and still retain intentional integrity.

Another feature of our basic structure ought to be mentioned. While some of the sentences in the basic structure refer to the story, others do not. Instead, they work from a theological structure that has been aligned with the plot line. If every move in a sermon were to begin with a first-sentence reference to the story and then a theological inference, the practice would create a redundant pattern that could drive a congregation crazy. Instead, some moves will begin with a theological understanding, for example, "4. If faith is only obedience, it can turn into dead law," and then reach back into the story. The result will be a natural interweaving of story line and theological meaning which we are seeking to achieve. Remember, we are being taught by skillful Black preaching as well as bottom-of-the-bed storytelling to children. What we have *not* done is to set up a telling of the whole story and, then, a deduction of some religious truth to apply to our lives.

### A Sermon Sketch

As we know, we need more than a list of sentences to produce a sermon. While basic structure is crucial, moves must be fleshed out. So, the single sentence, "1. The lepers cried 'Have pity!' and we can understand," might be sketched as follows:

1. See ten lepers all in a row: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" We can understand them. Times in every life when, at wits' end, we call for help. A cancer in the tummy—"God help me." Or a marriage turning sour—"Oh, God!" Or someone we love who is going to die—"God." Not always articulate. Sometimes a silent, inner cry. But, at the end of our rope, we do reach out for help. We turn to God. Like the lepers.

The little first-move sketch is a development of thought within a narrative framework: We begin with the story and return to the story. From such a quick sketch we can almost guess the kind of move that might emerge in a final outline.

1. See the ten lepers all in a row: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" We can understand, can't we? There are times in everyone's life when, at wits' end, we cry out for help. When we get to a point where we know our needs are huge and our strength small, then we call for help; the word "God" shapes our lips or echoes inside our minds.

*Example:* You've been to the doctor. He mutters something about a shadow on your X-ray. "Better not wait," he says, and schedules surgery for the next day. You leave his office in a strange daze. Inside yourself, you're crying out, "God help me."

*Example:* Or maybe your marriage, which began in a bright blush of wonder, has slowly turned into a cold war across a kitchen table where you're tossing words at each other like stones. And, suddenly, you realize something's gone wrong: "O God!"

*Example:* Or someone you love is going to die. You don't know how to talk about it, even to each other. You're all tight inside, and afraid of what's coming. You begin to daydream what it'll be like walking around in an empty house: "Oh, God help me," you cry.

Look, our lives are shaped by agony. We're human and there are human tragedies that come to us all. Then, when there's nothing else to do, and even if we don't quite believe, we find ourselves saying a kind of prayer: "God. Oh, God." Like the desperate lepers all lined in a row, bawling at the top of their lungs, "Jesus, Master, have pity." See the ten lepers calling for help.

If you look back at the brief sketch of the move, you can see that the preliminary shape of a full move is already there. Notice that the move has been developed from our homiletic analysis of the passage, for it combines theological understanding—"a universal cry of wits' end humanity"—with analogies of experience. The move begins with a story-line reference and ends with a story-line reference, so the following move can commence with Jesus' response. If the next move were to connect on the basis of theology, without reference to the story, the final two sentences would be dropped, and be replaced by a general statement such as "There are times when everyone calls to God."

Of course, we know we cannot develop a sermon by writing finished moves one at a time; we must overview the whole structure as it expands. So a sermon sketch for Luke 17:11-19 might look something like the following:

1. Ten lepers calling, "Have pity." We can understand. Times in every life when, at wits' end, we call out for help.

for example, Cancer in the tummy: God.  
for example, Marriage on the rocks: Oh God.  
for example, Someone dying: God help me.

Will come to all of us. Aloud or silently, "Oh God." Like the ten lepers, "Jesus, Master, have pity."

2. What does Jesus say? Of all things, he hands out a commandment, "Go!" Just like God! Again and again, we come hustling up to God, full of our own troubles, and what do we get? A command: "Go," "Love," "Serve," "Help."

*Illustration:* Doctor coming home after death of own baby, full of tears. Phone rings. Emergency room calling because of auto accident: "Come." Doctor, reflecting, laughs: "O.K. God, I got your message!"

We want God to give comfort, to patch up our souls. Not always. Sometimes, God's answer is a hard command—"Go," "Do." So the lepers called to Jesus for help. What did they get? Jesus turned and said, "Go!"—"Go and show yourselves to the priests." He gave a commandment.

3. Well, the lepers did as they were told. They obeyed the word of Jesus. Guess what, that's faith. Faith is obeying the word.

*Contrapuntal:* Oh, we think of faith as believing—maybe believing the creed printed in our bulletin. Or we think of faith as feeling, being filled full with a feeling of God in our hearts.

But, not in the Bible. In the Bible, faith has arms and legs: It does. Faith is nothing less than risking your life by doing the Word of God.

Brief examples: Saint Francis, John Calvin, Martin Luther King, Jr. They all heard word of Jesus and dared to do. They obeyed.

The lepers turned and did as Christ commanded. What is faith? Faith is doing as told: Faith is obedience.

4. Of course, if faith is no more than obedience, it can turn into a dreadful, dead law: "Doing the rules."

We've met such people. Religion, for them, is a list of commandments—"dos" and "don'ts" with the "don'ts" a longer list: Days of Obligation; prayers that have to be said at table; Bible study to be done on schedule—until God is subtly replaced by "the law."

But take a second look: The person is *us*. In all of us the sense of ought can easily take over. Then, faith turns into a weighty moralism: "I must," "I've got to."

Maybe that's what happened to the lepers. Though they were healed miraculously, they kept right on going, doing the commandment under a law of obedience. Faith, if it is only obedience, turns into stultifying law. So, the lepers, nine lepers, kept on going to Jerusalem.

5. But look! One turned back to Jesus Christ. See him down on the ground whooping it up, glorifying God, giving thanks to Jesus in a one-man nonstop cantata of praise. One leper came back to worship.

What else have we been doing here? Didn't we begin worship up on our feet giving praise? And, haven't we sung the Gloria? Soon, we will offer gifts and chant a doxology. Then, when we hear the words, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," we will answer, "It is right to give God thanks and praise." No wonder old Martin Luther tossed off a one-sentence definition of worship: "The tenth leper turning back!"

*Illustration:* Tell of puritan named "Thankful" who was famous for bellowing out *Old Hundredth*.