

You

Luke 17:11-19

October 9, 2016

Your name is Rahm and you are a leper.

You were not always a leper. There was a time -- it seems now like another lifetime or the lifetime of another person, not your own life -- a time when you were happy, at least as happy as you could be, considering.

You were an artist. You worked as a potter, creating simple but elegant vessels for everyday use, selling enough of them to keep a roof over your head and food on the table for you and your wife and your little girl.

But now you do not have work or a wife or a little girl. They didn't leave you; you left them. You had to leave them because you are a leper.

The lesions first appeared on your forearm, the forearm and palm of your left hand, but quickly, oh so quickly, the lesions spread to your legs and your back and then your face. It was that disease ... that dreaded skin disease for which there is no cure and no going back. It doesn't kill you, at least not directly, but it takes away everything, everything you have, everything you love, everything you are.

This is what you are now -- a leper.

You sleep -- if you can call it sleep. You close your eyes, but your body burns, and every time you turn the stabbing pain jolts you awake again. You sleep in a mud hut, an isolated mud hut thrown up at the foot of the hill just north of the village. You sleep there with nine other men, lepers like you, exiles like you, cut off from the rest of the village, cut off from the rest of humanity, like you.

Only they are not like you. They are Jews, Jewish men born in a Jewish village, but you are a Samaritan. And though they are lepers like you they have this to hold over you, that you are a Samaritan. This is the one shred of dignity they can hold on to, that they are better than you, because you are ... one of "those people!"

They sleep with you and eat with you and beg scraps of food with you -- what choice do they have? or you? -- but they do not let you forget that you are despised.

That's the "considering" part, the part that kept your life from being as happy as it might have been, even before the disease took every happiness away. You were an outcast, always an outcast. And now ... you are an outcast among outcasts.

One day, Jesus came walking by, walking up the road into the village, the road not too close but not too far either from the mud hut at the foot of the hill. You didn't know him, but some of the others did. They ran toward the road and you followed, all of you stopping while still at a distance, still at a respectful distance from him and the others with him. And they called out to him: "Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!"

He stopped and looked in your direction and said: "Go and let the priests examine you."

So you did. You went. They went and you went with them, all ten of you walking together into the village to see the priest. And then ...

Even now there are no words to tell it, because what happened then was beyond understanding, even beyond belief, except that it did happen, except that it did happen to you. You were healed! You were all making your way to the house of the priest and then you were healed, all of you. The disease, the lesions, were simply gone. You didn't see anything, hear anything, feel anything. It just was.

They all starting running, some of them toward the houses of wives, fathers, sisters, brothers, and some of them still toward the house of the priest to receive from him official confirmation that they were indeed now clean. Clean!

But you ran back. You ran back to the man on the road, to Jesus. You didn't care that he was a Jew and you a Samaritan. You didn't think about that at all. You only knew this: that God had been good to you, good beyond all hope and all imagining. God had been good to you and this godly man, this man of God, was the reason.

So you ran back to him, found him on the road, and threw yourself onto the ground at his feet, honoring him, thanking him, thanking and praising and honoring God, because you knew this came from God, and not just his God, not just the Jewish God, just God, the One God, the God who is, the God who is good ... your God.

And he said to you, Jesus said to you: "Get up and go; your faith has made you well." And then you understood: you are well! Well not because your skin is free of that terrible disease, but well because he speaks to you. Well because he sees you. Well because he sees you. He does not see a leper. He does not see a Samaritan. He sees you.

He sees you. He cares about you. He loves you. And because he sees you and loves you, you know -- you know! -- that God sees you and God loves you and you know that you are well and you know that you will be well ... always.

Your name is Faez and you are a refugee.

You were not always a refugee. There was a time when you were happy, at least as happy as you could be, considering. Considering the turmoil and violence that engulfed your hometown and your homeland.

You lived with your wife in Daraa in southern Syria, walking to your healthcare job each day and returning each evening, even as Syrian army troops and rebel insurgents clashed in the streets around your home.

But one morning, as you walked to work, they stopped you. They stopped you and accused you of being a terrorist. They made you raise your hands and they aimed a gun at you and you “felt death upon [you].”

But an old woman suddenly came into the street, pleading for your life and for the lives of those detained with you. And the soldiers let you go.

But everything had changed. In your mind and in your heart, everything had changed. You feared for your life and for the life of your wife. You knew you had to leave, leave your home and your homeland. You were a refugee.

You gathered your wife and a few belongings and the next morning you left your home -- forever -- walking an hour and a half through the streets of the city even as deadly missiles crashed into the buildings around you.

You met the car of a smuggler who drove you to the Jordanian border where you were taken to the refugee camp at Zaatari. From there you were smuggled again out of the camp and into the city of Amman where you spent two years working “off the books” and waiting for the UN to find a place to resettle your family.

Life in Jordan was difficult. You were a refugee. You felt exploited at work and shunned at home. You received little or no aid and glimmers of hopes for resettlement in Sweden and then Finland quickly faded.

But then they told you you were going to the United States. You were scared. It was so far away, so far away from everything you knew. You would go with almost nothing to a place you knew almost nothing about. You had never even flown on a plane before.

But you went and now you and your wife and two baby girls live in Richardson, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. You work third shift at the local Walmart and life is good ... considering. Considering you are still a refugee.

You are safe. Your family is safe. You have work. You have a home. But you are a refugee. A Syrian refugee.

Most of your neighbors oppose admitting refugees into “their” country. In the nearby town of Irving, protesters, armed with masks and tactical weapons, gathered outside a mosque, protesting the “Islamization of America.”

Your governor wants to deny entry to any and all future refugees, quite probably including the six of your own relatives from Syria who were supposed to be relocated to Dallas to be near you. And a candidate for president of your new home country has vowed to deport any refugees already here and to keep watch lists of immigrants like you, to keep close tabs on refugees like you. You are worried. You are worried about your family. You have a home, but you are not home. You are a refugee, still a refugee, still an outcast.

Who will see you? Who will see you? See not a refugee, not a Syrian Muslim, but see you?

Who will heal the deeper wounds in you? Who will make you well?

(The details of Faez' story come from an article by Alex Altman, "A Syrian Refugee Story" -- <http://time.com/a-syrian-refugee-story/>)