

Windfall: Luke 17:11-19

by [Barbara Sholis](#) in the [October 5, 2004](#) issue

There are moments when you just know what's coming next. No one has to confirm it for you; the feeling in your gut is confirmation enough. After I lay on the ultrasound table for two minutes, the technician left me alone while she went to find the radiologist. I knew I was in trouble. No one had biopsied anything. No one had uttered the word "cancer," much less "lobular invasive carcinoma," but I knew. Four days and seven biopsies later, the surgeon's words, "Barbara, you do have breast cancer," drifted through the phone receiver to me. But the news was redundant.

As the next day dawned, the idea of cancer began to sink in. I cried as I got out of bed. I cried in the shower. I cried putting on my makeup. I cried driving to work. I sat at my desk and couldn't stop the flow of tears. I could only see the word "cancer" staring back from the computer screen. While I sat there, paralyzed with fear, a colleague knocked lightly on my door: "Hey Barb, Dr. Stone is in the library." A busy doctor stopping by on a Friday morning to return a book to the church library—how often does that happen? Although she is not my doctor, I pulled her into my office as if I'd been thrown a life preserver. Reaching out with compassion, she brought Christ the Healer to me.

The next week, I spent time with my spiritual director. As shock muffled my ability to experience God's abiding presence with me, my director invited me to open myself to discover all the ways God was reassuring me that I was not walking this journey by myself. Driving home I formed this prayer for guidance: "Seek God, see God, choose life."

When chemotherapy causes your hair to fall out, robs you of your energy and fills your mouth with canker sores, you begin to develop empathy with the ten lepers. There is no hiding the fact that you are diseased. Your cancer walks into the room before you do and people who know better still flinch—as they did before lepers, who were made to live outside the community, who had to beg for survival.

But Jesus, approaching the village, sees the lepers and doesn't flinch; he shows compassion. While most walk by and choose to look away, Jesus chooses to see their

misery and hear their calls for healing. As was the religious practice, he sends them to the priests. Luke tells us: “And as they went, they were made clean.”

Can you imagine experiencing a miraculous healing? I am sure the lepers were speechless, overwhelmed with the shock of disbelief at their good fortune. One moment they were living a dreadful, diseased, quarantined existence, and then, in the time it took to walk to the village priest, their skin healed, their vision cleared, their sores dried up. The local priest sounded the “all clear,” freeing them to return to society, to their homes, to a productive life. If you think about your own probable reaction, it is hard to blame the lepers for scattering to the wind and leaving the past behind them like a bad dream.

But Luke tells us that one leper, the Samaritan, the foreigner, upon seeing before his eyes the miraculous healing of his body, is overcome with gratitude. He turns back to thank Jesus. We know from his loud voice, his falling flat on his face at the Master’s feet, that even his body cannot contain his praise and thanksgiving.

This miracle story reminds me of Helen Keller’s memory of the miracle in her life. “Suddenly,” she writes, “I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought, and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could, in time, be swept away. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. . . . Every object that I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me.”

It has been said that gratitude may be the purest measure of one’s character and spiritual condition. “Seek God, see God, choose life.” The prayer continues to serve me well. It reminds me that I, too, see everything with strange, new sight. Like the tenth leper, I never want to lose sight of the miracle of God’s grace. Being grateful as I awaken to the gift of each day is the key. Alan Culpepper writes, “Are we self-made individuals beholden to no one, or are we blessed daily in ways we seldom perceive, cannot repay and for which we often fail to be grateful? Here is a barometer of spiritual health: although gratitude is not synonymous with faith, neither response to God can be separated from the other.”

The tenth leper’s faithful, untainted gratitude for God’s mercy is humbling to see. He realizes that life is a gift, that “just to get up each day is windfall” (John Claypool).

Life can make you feel as if you have lead in your shoes. It can leave you lost, wandering and wondering. But gratitude brings buoyancy. It is the antidote for fear. Gratitude flips despair on its back and says, "You're not robbing me of today!"