

Proper 23C  
Luke 17:11-19  
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“A Piece of Cake”  
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*On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease 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’s feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”*

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The doctor told the octogenarian couple that they were both in great physical shape, but they might want to start writing things down to help them with their memory issues. That evening, while watching TV, the man got up from his chair and his wife asked, “If you go to the kitchen, would you get me piece of cake?” Agreeably, the man said he would. Playfully, she said, “Don't you think you should write it down so you don't forget it?” He responded that he was certain he could remember. But the woman pressed, “Well, I'd like some strawberries on top. You'd better write it down because I know you'll forget it.” A little irritated now, the man assured her he could remember cake with strawberries. Then she added, “I'd also like whipped cream on top. You really should be writing

this down.” He shuffled off to the kitchen and started banging around. After about 30 minutes he returned from the kitchen and handed his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stared at the plate for a moment and then said, "Where's my toast?"<sup>1</sup>

A piece of cake. It seemed so simple. But sometimes, what seems simple on the surface ends up being more complicated than we expect. That's certainly true of the stories we just heard — Naaman in Second Kings, and the ten with a skin disease in Luke. Skin diseases, specifically leprosy, were a real problem in the ancient world. There was no cure and the affected were usually forced to leave their homes, families, and lives to subsist in colonies away from population centers, reliant on the charity of others to survive.

Naaman, a commander in the king's army from neighboring Aram (present-day Syria), was an exception. He was able to retain his position and property despite his illness. When an Israelite servant suggested that a prophet from her home in Samaria could cure him, Naaman wasted no time in seeking out Elisha. Not even bothering to meet him at the door, Elisha's messenger instructed him to bathe in the Jordan River and be cured. Eventually, Naaman relented, and his skin became healthy and youthful once more.

In the case of the ten men in Luke's gospel, they called out to Jesus for mercy, and he instructed them to head straight to the priest — the only one who could declare them healed. As they went, their illness left them. They, too, were cured.

We know that sometimes the remedy can feel worse than the disease. But in the case of Naaman and the ten, the cure was, well, a piece of cake: a bath for Naaman, a walk to the priest for the ten. In the words of Ina Garten, *"How easy is that?!"* The simplest solution is often best —

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<sup>1</sup> "A Couple In Their 80s," Upjoke.com: <https://upjoke.com/piece-of-cake-jokes>.

Occam's Razor. But here's the catch: simple doesn't mean easy. And because so much of life isn't simple, we're often skeptical when it is.

Naaman's servant said it best: *"If the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?"* I wonder if the ten were skeptical too. A walk to the priest's house to cure leprosy? It must have sounded almost dismissive.

If we're honest, Jesus' solutions to the problems of his day often sounded just as simple:

- Love your neighbor.
- Don't judge.
- Don't worry.
- Turn the other cheek.
- Give Caesar what is Caesar's and give God what is God's.
- Share.
- Welcome strangers.
- Clothe, house, and feed those in need.
- Serve.
- Make peace.

Simple instructions for a complicated world. A divine "piece of cake." But while these teachings are simple to say, they're anything but easy to live. When we face the exploding crisis of homelessness, or extreme violence in the Middle East, or political and social conflict in our own communities, it can almost sound insulting to hear Jesus say: *house those in need* or *make peace* or *don't worry*.

These are complex, deeply layered issues. The problems are overwhelming. And when someone offers a solution that sounds simple, we often doubt whether they're taking the problem seriously at all. Naaman certainly did: *"I thought he would surely come out and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the spot and cure*

*the skin disease.*” Take a bath? That’s so simple it almost feels disrespectful to the suffering.

But here’s the thing: the simplicity of Jesus’ way isn’t naivety — it’s radical clarity. Loving neighbors, feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers — these things aren’t complicated. They’re just costly. They require trust, courage, and faith.

Maybe faith isn’t about mastering complexity. Maybe faith is about trusting the simple way enough to actually walk it. Like Naaman stepping into the river. Like the ten walking toward the priest. Like us — choosing, again and again, to love, to share, to serve, even when it doesn’t feel like enough.

The solutions Jesus offers are simple. Living them out is the hard part. But it is also — perhaps — the part that makes us truly well. Amen.