

Sunday 12th October 2025: Trinity 17, Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling.

Some words from St Paul in today's Epistle, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth."*

In other words, 'be yourself', or be 'comfortable in your own skin.' When someone feels that it means they are content, confident, and happy with who they are, they have a sense of self-acceptance, assurance, and genuine happiness with their identity. They feel they have authenticity, and not feeling the need to pretend, and present themselves as superficial, just 'skin deep.'

How many people do you know and might have known for some time, but you still feel you don't know them at all because all you see is superficial, skin deep.

Sometimes you hear a person say, *"I am just not comfortable in my own skin."* We all feel that way sometimes when circumstances or a situation comes our way and we struggle to cope and we feel 'out of our comfort zone'. It might be that we think we are failing someone else's expectations, or we must compete. It may be a sense of defeat, loneliness, or isolation within a relationship or a family, with friends or a church. Difficult events may suddenly come along such as illness, or a death, a break down in a relationship, or some other significant change in life. All these things may cause us to lose that sense of our identity which may cause us to convey a false self that it is only skin deep.

If today's Gospel statistics are any indication, then ninety percent of us live life skin deep. That is, we live only on the surface with a "what you see is what you get" attitude and there is nothing else. At skin deep level our view of life is mostly determined by whether life is going our way and whether we get what we want. Life is superficial, day-to-day-survival, and if we are honest with ourselves and go

a bit deeper than skin deep, it leaves us feeling that something is missing.

More than anything else skin-deep level life seeks to be comfortable; physically, emotionally, socially, financially and spiritually. There is nothing wrong with that until we choose to settle for being comfortable rather than moving to a deeper place, a deeper way of seeing, relating, and living. Sometimes comfort can insulate us from the reality of life and the presence of God. We read that in the Gospel when only one in ten of the lepers, is willing to move in a new direction, to seek a wholeness that cannot be found in mere comfort and superficial satisfaction.

For nine of the ten lepers though, that superficial satisfaction of being cured of their awful condition meant everything. Because of the disease each one had no family, no friends except each other, no work, no temple, no community. They were excluded from society. If anyone started coming close, the leper was required to cry out “unclean, unclean.” Not surprising then, that they wanted to go back to life they had before, when they were clean. For them, skin deep comfort would be enough. So, they cry out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” In response, maybe they hoped for a piece of bread, some water, a blanket or just to hear a kind word and simply wanted to be acknowledged as a person and, if only for a moment, feel like a human being again. Jesus grants their request, has mercy on them and cures their disease, but that is all. They ask for a cure and receive one, but they don’t ask it seems to be healed at a level much deeper than skin deep.

Regardless of our skin condition we too may know what it is like, to be like these lepers. We may not have lived under the same conditions, but we could each tell a story about a time when we were not comfortable in our own skin. On those occasions for us and for many in society today, today’s leprosy is not a medical or to do with status, it is a spiritual condition, a disease of our inner most

selves. Its symptoms may have nothing to do with our skin but like leprosy it distorts how we see and relate to God, the world, others, and ourselves. We respond by keeping life at a superficial level and settle for being comfortable rather than being changed, seek relief rather than wholeness, desire something from Jesus for ourselves more than we desire Jesus for who He is.

Nine of the ten lepers settle just for a declaration of cleanness, they hurry away, swept up in the joy of their recovery, forgetting the hand that healed them. But one, looks below the surface, to see more than just new skin. He sees a reality and healing of a deeper, inner condition, to do with the heart, his true self. But he also knows that if he really wants the healing and wholeness that Jesus offers, he will have to turn around and go in a new direction different from the other nine, a direction he is no longer in control of. He responds to this need from within and he goes back to face Jesus and thanks him and in so doing, enters a relationship with him. While nine lepers celebrate new skin, this one give thanks with tears of gratitude for the amazing grace given him by the creator and restorer of not just new skin, but a whole new life and way of being. Nine lepers hear the priests say, "You are clean," one hears his saviour say, "Your faith has made you well."

What Jesus offers is more than skin deep; He desires more for us than we often desire for ourselves, life in all its fullness. "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" he asks as He asks us all, 'where are you?'. The question is not a rebuke, but an invitation to live not just skin deep but in Him.

Thanks be to God. Amen.