

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost-October 11

Thanksgiving Day October 12

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God our Father, your generous goodness comes to us new every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14 When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus’s feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? 18 Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Commentary:

Professor Eric Barreto from Princeton University warns us about breezing through Gospel readings thinking we know them by saying, “If Jesus’ words never strike me as strange, if Jesus words never cause me a sense of unrest, if Jesus words never trouble me, then I can be sure of one thing: I can be sure I am missing something important”. (He often says this and it appears in material from Working Preacher, from Luther Seminary in Minnesota).

Why does Jesus call out people who just did what he told them to do: show themselves to the priests so they can be reintegrated into community? Why does Luke (and also Jesus) make a big deal that the one who does praise God is a Samaritan—a foreigner. And finally what is significant about the illness affecting these ten people living on the margins between Samaria and Galilee?

Outsiders:

We might get purchase on two of our questions by reviewing ancient protocols for quarantine for people with skin diseases. These customs and protocols are recorded in the books of Leviticus and Numbers in the Hebrew scriptures (The Old

Testament). The next item of information is a bit grisly, so beware....many skin diseases literally were decomposition leaving people to look like they were dead or dying (zombie films might come to mind). It's as if "death comes calling". Strict rules and laws surrounded the way dead creatures were to be handled.

To avoid contagion, those with such necrotic (tissue dying) diseases were quarantined and required to tear their clothes, and wear their hair loose (for women this would be particularly troubling given social customs about hair being worn gathered and covered). Should any unaffected person approach, those with infections were required to call out "unclean! unclean!" An 'insider' becomes an outcast for as long as the physical disease persists.

Even following recovery, those who had been infected were to have a priest inspect wounds and skin. Then a 7 day probationary period began so sufferers would be monitored for a relapse. Therefore, becoming an insider again might be a tenuous proposition. Given these long standing customs then....

Jesus approaches ten people with infection, isolated from family and community and suffering physically and emotionally— and looking like 'death warmed over'. The legal and acceptable thing to do would be to avoid these ten people "like the plague". Jesus "goes there" and the scandal begins!

And one of them was a Samaritan!

The enmity between the Jewish people and Samaritans was centuries old. Alarming that a "foreigner", a Samaritan would languish among his sworn enemies and now fellow sufferers.

Jesus heals ten people without discriminating between ethnic origins. Why would Jesus make a point then of saying the one who returned to praise God was a *foreigner*?

Being from literally another place is to be dis-placed. Perhaps this person is even more isolated than the other nine because he lacks extended family or a home to which he hopes to return. The "foreigner" suffering a skin disease is about as outside as an outsider can get. Once healed his response causes Jesus to remark about its oddity.

Luke makes a point of lifting up the times Samaritans flout the norms of society and wind up upholding higher values. For instance, Dr. Barreto notes in an article from Working Preacher that when the Samaritan helps someone who had been

mugged the victim faces a fate in which a familiar enemy might well be the rescuer.

Here the Samaritan returns not to say thanks, but to praise God. Sociologists Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh note that in peasant culture social equals didn't thank each other. Instead they repaid in kind somehow. So for nine people, not saying thank you to Jesus is standard practice. So is going to show themselves to the priests for re-integration into community. For most, this would be a satisfying end to the story.

But that Samaritan...who doesn't have a priest to inspect his skin or readmit him to community does something scandalous and very public. He acknowledges that there is no way he could EVER repay the gift he's received. He returns to Jesus and loudly praises God who in many respects gives him back his life! The Samaritan's public giving thanks to God also signifies that he has everything he needs now to put his life back together.

Things to ponder:

about disconnection

In what ways might you identify with any of the ten people Jesus heals?

What times in your life have you felt especially 'cut off' or displaced?

Where did you experience connection when we all were isolated and quarantined when the COVID virus was most virulent and contagious?

At what point during the Covid crisis did you feel safe enough to begin reconnecting with people and resuming accustomed routines?

about belonging

In what ways might you particularly identify with the Samaritan?

Have you ever been the "foreigner"—not from here or totally belonging? What did that experience teach you?

about gifts large and small

What gifts do you recognize as ones you would never be able to repay?

Communities gather to praise God. What does such gathering mean in terms of God's bringing life where there was death?