

Homily - October 11, 2020
Harvest Thanksgiving
Rev'd Paul J. Walker - St. John's Elora
Luke 17:11-19

Our gospel reading today, appointed for Harvest Thanksgiving, is a familiar story of the cleansing of the ten lepers.

One of the things that strikes me in this story is there is a lot of physical movement in the text. There's a lot of the kind of activity that we are discouraged to do on this Thanksgiving weekend - *a lot of travelling*.

Jesus is *on his way* to Jerusalem and *going through* the region between Samaria and Galilee.

He's on his way. He's between regions. He's moving.

Not much usually happens when you're *between* regions. No one really lives there. It's between areas.

Between these two regions is what's known as the Great Plain. It's largely uninhabited. But there is a village - a pit stop between Nazareth and Jerusalem.

And as he enters this village ten lepers approach him — *keeping their distance*.

Of course it's the lepers, who else would live between the regions? They didn't belong *in* a region. They were forced to live *outside* the region.

They call Jesus "Master" and they cry out for his mercy.

So you have Jesus on the move; and ten lepers on the move coming towards him.

And Jesus says "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

Where they went to meet these priests when they were between regions is not clear, but one could suspect that it might be Jerusalem. That's usually where you find priests. As they saying goes, it's the journey not the destination that makes the difference.

And "as they went, they were made clean." *All* of them. They hadn't even arrived in Jerusalem to meet the priests yet. They were still on their way.

Then one of them looks at himself, while on the way, and turns back before he even reaches the priest, because as he looks at himself he realizes the impossible was fulfilled.

He realizes that he was cleansed and healed and wanted to come back to thank Jesus. He was so overcome he began trembling with gratitude. He was amazed at what happened. And he praised God with a loud voice. It's all very demonstrative, loud, ecstatic, and unrestrained. This time, he doesn't just approach Jesus, he runs right up to Jesus and falls prostrate at his feet to thank him. It's all very visible, public, and physical.

This kind of description is meant to remind us of another story earlier in Luke. You remember the story of the sinful woman who enters the dinner party and falls at Jesus's feet

weeping, anointing his feet with perfume, then she starts kissing his feet, and wiping them with her hair. How can this go unnoticed? The other dinner guests begin asking one another, *“If this man were a prophet he would know what kind of woman this is, that she is a sinner.”* It’s all over the top, unreserved, so excessive it’s embarrassing. Certainly it’s not very Anglican.

But, like the Samaritan leper who came back to say thank you, she too is a condemned outsider, a sinner who was forgiven, who has come back to say thank you. They are both stories of outsiders who receive something they never thought possible. They are cleansed, forgiven, and restored, and they both come back to say thank you.

It’s a gift that the woman never could have imagined possible. It’s a gift that the Samaritan leper never could have imagined possible.

As Jesus says, the one who has been forgiven much, loves much; and the one who has been forgiven little, loves little.

Well for these two, *they love very much*, because they know that they were forgiven very much, cleansed very much, and restored very much!

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It’s a gushy, emotive, excessive yet intentional expression of sincere and deep gratitude for what has been accomplished for this Samaritan leper, and for this sinful woman.

But, for the Samaritan leper, he still wasn’t yet restored to his community, only the priest had the authority to do that, and he hadn’t yet made it to the priest yet. Or had he? Jesus says, *“Get up, go on your way, your faith has made you well.”* Literally the phrase is “your faith has saved you.”

It’s the same phrase that Jesus says to the sinful woman, “your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” And in saying that, Jesus affirms his role of being *the* priest. He claims the same authority of a priest to forgive, and the same authority of a priest to restore someone to the community.

At the end of the day isn’t that what we all long for? To know that we are forgiven; and to know that we are restored to community?

When we look at ourselves and realize that this gift has been offered, accomplished, and secured for us, then without flinching, like the Samaritan leper and the sinful woman, we run back and find whatever excessive, over the top expression of gratitude you can possibly imagine (that doesn’t compromise public health guidelines), and with a loud voice, or with tears and kisses and perfume, or with generous hearts, you fall down at Jesus’ feet and offer your sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, as you say “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”