

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Year C - 9/10/2016

Jeremiah 29: 1,4-7
Psalm 66:1-11
2 Timothy 2: 8-15
Luke 17:11-19

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’” (Lk.17:19) This line, the final one from the Gospel today, is a rather confusing conclusion to the account we receive of the healing of the ten lepers. Unique to Luke’s Gospel, it is another story (like the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son) which challenges us deeply to understand afresh what is meant by the words hospitality and gratitude.

So why do I say that it is confusing? Think again about the passage. Jesus encounters the lepers as he travels, somewhere between Samaria and Galilee. It is not clear, although many commentators have made the point, as to whether he is in Gentile territory. But either way, the notion of boundaries and borders does have something to do with the story.

Upon hearing them cry out for mercy (understood in this case as *healing*), Jesus simply says “‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were made clean.” (Lk.17:14b) All ten were made clean. Let us be clear about that - all ten were healed of their disease - that terrible disease which has resulted in their isolation from community; the separation from their family; their inability to function in any level of society.

So why is it that Jesus makes the point, when the one returns to give thanks, that his faith has made him well? What about the other nine? They were also healed - was this by their faith? Or does Jesus mean that this one - the thankful one - has received something *more* than the other nine... hence my confusion.

Let me offer just a couple of points about this passage.

Firstly - I don't often criticize the translators of the NRSV, but in this case I think they have got it wrong - or at least they have downplayed the significance of what Jesus says. When verse 19 has Jesus saying "your faith has made you well", this is not strong enough. Many commentators and other translations make the point that the original Greek suggests more like: "your faith has *saved you*". This is salvation - this is the proclamation, to an outsider, like a Samaritan, that by faith, this leper has been saved. Not only healed of disease, but saved; claimed by God, and redeemed for all time and eternity.

This is what the other nine lepers failed to receive. They were impoverished (in spite of their physical healing) because they did not recognize exactly what had occurred, or who it was that they had encountered, and what was being offered to them. They were willing, it seems, to simply accept physical healing, when there was so much more on offer.

And it made me think about the times in my own life when I have failed to appreciate what was happening - when I was willing to settle for the obvious; the quick win, when so much more was possible, by God's grace. And so I think of times when perhaps I have hurried - rushed, and missed the opportunity for grace. I remember a time on one of my very first times of retreat, with Trinity College, when we were staying at Palotti College in Warburton. I was out on a walk. My goal was to reach the end of the track that ran along the side of the water course. But I was conscious that there was another session in an hour, so I was going to have to be quick.

And as I strode out along the path, looking mostly at the ground in front of me, to make sure I was not going to trip over uneven ground or a rock, I just happened to glance up, in time to see a kangaroo, slowly hopping along the scrub just metres from me. And as I stopped, it too stopped, and held my gaze for what seemed like minutes.

And then, just as I had decided that I really needed to keep going if I was going to get to the end, a little head popped out of the kangaroo's pouch, and I was treated to the most exquisite sight of the little joey, looking first at me, and then up at its mum, as if to say - "who and what is that??"!

My rush to reach my goal almost cost me the opportunity for that wonderful interaction...

And then, as I ponder this passage, I think about something else - gratitude. How often is our mind-set anything but grateful? I know myself that I am far more likely to be drawn to the negative aspects of life - war, injustice, natural disasters, examples of people mistreating others. And more likely to miss the positive signs of people helping others, or the love that is given freely to me, or the beauty of the world around me.

And so this passage condemns me and my negative outlook - because even in the face of the miraculous actions of God through Christ, only one of the ten who experienced this actually returned to give thanks - to show how grateful he was.

And the thing is, gratitude is a mindset - it's actually a choice for us. Now of course, for someone mired in the despair of a recent tragedy, or a person in Haiti at the moment facing unimaginable destruction, the choice for gratitude might seem like a dream. But for the majority of us, we can choose how we respond to life - we can choose what it is we will notice and focus on, and be thankful for.

And as the American psychotherapist, Melody Beattie, reminds us today about gratitude it is this:

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend."

And when I think about the life and ministry of Christ, I see quite clearly and obviously that this is what he brought to those who encountered him - think of the wedding at Cana or the feeding of the 5000 - what we have turned into enough. Think about the woman at the well - how confusion became clarity, as she proclaimed Jesus as Messiah. Think about the numbers of people brought together by Christ, turned from stranger to friend.

Yes, it seems to me that there is just one thing that we are called to, in the face of the love and mercy and grace of God seen in the person of Christ - and that is we are called to gratitude. Love and thanks that should overflow in our lives, and spread, dare I say, like wildfire so that those who encounter us might wonder exactly where this gratitude comes from.

And who knows, when they ask, maybe we will be able to have the gratitude to God that enables us, like the Samaritan leper, to proclaim out loud our thanks and praise to God, who has given us so much...

In the name of God. Amen.