

October 9, 2016
Luke 17:11-19

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

A teenager sits alone eating her lunch in a bathroom stall, tears running down her face, and afraid to walk back into the hallway and head to class. She has been shunned by her peers, deemed not cool, teased and taunted in every way imaginable, embarrassed, humiliated, abused, and is left feeling completely alone at school.

A man living with HIV struggles each day to be accepted by his family, peers, and society due to the stigmas associated with this disease. Without knowing his story many turn away, judge him as being sexually promiscuous, unclean, and are fearful to have any contact with him whatsoever. He feels abandoned, depressed, and clings to hope of being welcomed back into community.

A father loses his job due to retrenchment by his employer. He searches for another job but sadly one door after another continues to close on him. The mortgage and bills mount and are past due until one day the family loses their home. They are forced to live in their car, find food at shelters, dig through dumpsters, and endure the countless stares by those

they encounter. In the blink of an eye they have gone from middle class to “no-class” in they eyes of public opinion.

Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem continues in our gospel text this week; a point Luke makes clear in verse 11. His eyes are set on what lies ahead, his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, and as the listener of this text Luke makes certain our eyes too are focused on Jesus’ journey toward the cross. But as He journeys ever closer to Jerusalem Jesus’ eyes turn to a group of 10 lepers. 10 lepers suffering from a skin disease, their bodies covered with sores, outcast from society due to Levitical laws deeming them unclean, and desperately calling out to Jesus.

Here they sit on the outskirts of town, alone, ashamed, shunned, and with seemingly nowhere to turn. They can’t attend worship. They can’t associate with anyone and in the rare case a person approaches; they have to shout, “Unclean, Unclean!” As they sit along the side of the road in the dirt and dust they see a man approaching. As he gets closer they recognize him and plead their case while keeping their distance. Clearly they have heard of the miraculous works Jesus has been doing. Unlike so many others, they realize the power and authority Jesus has been given. With their voices they call out to be heard. They call for justice, for peace, for healing, and to be restored to community. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

What caught the attention of my eye this week upon reading the text is the words that immediately follow the plea of these lepers. We might presume Luke who have said something to the effect of “upon hearing their plea Jesus responded by saying...” but what Luke tells us instead is, “When he saw them.” Jesus sees these 10 lepers. He sees their suffering and pain. He sees them and he has compassion on them; regardless of the fact that most of society fails to see them.

As they are sent by Jesus to present themselves to the priests, healed of their condition, probably jumping for joy for their good fortunes, Luke informs us 1 leper, a Samaritan, sees the miracle Jesus has just performed. We are not explicitly told the other 9 were Samaritans; however, we are told this one was. Samaritans, while related to the Jews, had serious theological differences with orthodox Jews. Additionally, there were racial differences and most faithful Jews would avoid contact with Samaritans or the region of Samaria. Yet, that is exactly where we find Jesus today. In the midst of the presence of outsiders, foreigners, and strangers. Through Jesus’ act this lepers eyes have been opened to God’s healing power and he returns to Jesus giving thanks and praise. Perhaps, he had no money or other gifts to give in response to Jesus’ divine mercy; however, what he gives is his whole being as he lays it down before Jesus.

Friends, we gather on Sunday mornings to join with the leper in giving thanks and praise to the Triune God for all we have been given. Our eyes too have been opened by the Spirit to believe and trust that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us restoring us to God and giving us a permanent place in God's family as we are joined to the Body of Christ. In the waters of Holy Baptism we are reminded of this promise, of the healing gift of new life in Christ, of the restoration to the body of Christ no matter what it is we may have done, of the abundant forgiveness God offers, and of the very fact NOTHING can separate us from the love of God.

I would dare to say we have all played the part of the leper at some point in our life. We have all been in the position of feeling abandoned, isolated, shunned, lost, and clinging to hope someone will see us and help us. As we look back we can probably see Jesus' presence in our lives in these dire times coming to us, seeing us through the eyes of a friend, a loved one, a community of faith such as this, and reminding us that we are someone, we are God's, and welcoming us back regardless of the problems, the sins, and illnesses we all come with. As a community called and gathered by the living God, united in the arms of Jesus Christ, and sent forth by the Holy Spirit we are empowered to see the lepers in our midst. Where are they? Who are they?

In conclusion, I won't talk much about our political climate. I believe each of us have to discern and listen to our Christian heart; however, I do believe we can apply this text to the challenges so many of us face. The struggle with how to respond to someone close to us we may so deeply disagree with. The temptation to respond with words we may later regret saying. Or possibly the very real fact many put up a wall, fail to listen to another who supports the other candidate, and in so doing we foster the division that separates us from one another. I struggle so much watching and listening to the political banter going on, the name-calling, the finger pointing, and the failure to simply see, listen, and respect the other. And yesterday I found myself doing the very same thing. I disagree with both candidates on many things. I struggle with many of the words, actions, and decisions of both candidates during this campaign season and even prior to it. I admit the latest comments by one of the candidates made every ounce of my being cringe. Comments such as those can't be condoned no matter which side you stand on. Yet, how quickly was I to instinctively respond with negative words about said candidate and I had to stop and realize I had just done the very same thing. I had bought into what is happening on our television screens and airwaves. I was bearing witness to my own children it is OK to spew hatred at someone. In a teachable moment, I chose another route to which I

am sorry for. I seek the mercy of God. I return to the font to hear the promise of forgiveness. We may not agree with our neighbor on who to vote for. We may not like one of the candidates. We may never agree. We may never grow to like the candidate we stand in opposition to. But we are called to respond as Jesus does today. We are called to see. We are called to listen and be open. We are called to bridge the barriers that separate us. We are called to respond with mercy and compassion.

Main Point: Jesus sees us. Jesus sees all people. Jesus offers life. Jesus offers healing and wholeness. Jesus offers restoration.