

October 13, 2019
Luke 17:11-19

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

“This body is a gift” was the opening line of a sermon delivered by Dr. Shauna Hannan at a conference I attended last week.ⁱ Like a sudden flash of lightning and the corresponding crash of thunder stirring me from a deep sleep, these first few words grabbed my attention.

I always love to receive a gift – even one I wonder what in the world am I going to do with that or one I really didn’t need. It may be a bit cliché, but there is something to the adage of, “it’s the thought that counts.” A gift from a friend, loved one, or even someone you may not know all that well brings with it a host of emotions and feelings – happy, joyful, grateful, loved, appreciated, and sometimes may even move us to tears.

Sometime after my brother suddenly died a few years ago and I was struggling to make sense of it and coping with my sorrow and grief a gift arrived in the mailbox. A small book titled *May You Find Comfort A Blessing for Times of Grieving* (Joyce Rupp, 2009 Ave Marie Press, Inc.) with a short note tucked inside from my Spiritual Advisor. That gift still sits on the shelf in my office and I return to it from time-to-time when those moments of “grief bursts” hit, as we all know they continue to do, bringing back a rush of memories and emotions of a loved one lost. In sending me that gift, there came with it the understanding that my Spiritual Advisor saw me.

Jesus, the world’s gift, is on a journey – to Jerusalem. To the cross and his glorification - God’s ultimate act of redemption. Jesus’ eyes surely are set on what lies ahead and I suspect his mind is as well. How could they not be? He knows what awaits him at the end of this arduous journey. Yet, Jesus’ sight will never be swayed from seeing the suffering in the world. Whether in the safe and friendly confines of his home territory of Galilee or along the border with Samaria in an area and a people most of Jesus’ kinfolk would rather avoid if possible, Jesus is an equal opportunity Lord of sight. So without asking for a photo ID, Green Card, health insurance card, membership status or whether these lepers are friend or foe, Jesus simply sees and responds as the One who sent him into the world responded to humanity following creation of man and woman in proclaiming it “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) He moves with care and compassion seeing the lepers, despite whatever skin ailment might have afflicted their bodies and left them standing on the outside looking in pleading for the mercy of anyone who would hear their cry. He sees them - as God sees them – very good – he sees the body as a gift and heals that which afflicts it.

The ten leave, just as Jesus commanded them to do, but then one body returns throwing himself on the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him and giving praise to God for the gift Jesus had just so graciously granted him. Restoration. Wholeness. Resurrection. The kingdom of God did indeed draw near. New life blossomed forth through the liberating light of the One who breaks the darkness.

This one body is a gift. The one body of the leper who returned, the nine bodies of the lepers who simply went on their way as Jesus commanded them to, each of our bodies individually and the one body we are each connected to like a branch on a vine or a sheep with its flock. The one body of Christ that is the church on earth.

What do you see as the gift of this one body? When is this body indeed just as God created it to be - "very good?" The church is a gift when one sister hurts and another sister in Christ sees that pain and helps bear it with her. The church is a gift when it sees the body of the leper in the world as Jesus sees it and strives together in Christian unity and love to help alleviate the debilitating brokenness of this body. The church is a gift when it sees the other 9 who walked away and doesn't judge them or hold them in contempt. The church is a gift when it speaks a word of hope in a broken world. The church is a gift when it encourages and supports another brother or sister. The church is a gift when we welcome the stranger and see their plight. The church is a gift when it rolls up its sleeves and makes dozens of greeting cards, assembles quilt after quilt, trims limb after limb for a sister in need, washes and scrubs siding, scrapes the wood of a gazebo used by many in the community and dawns it with the new life of a fresh coat of paint, shovels mulch, paints a door or railings leading to it, plants flowers and are faithful stewards of God's good gifts. This one body is indeed a gift. It is indeed very good.

Yet, this one body does become afflicted and diseased. The hurt inflicted on one another is very real. Words do indeed have damaging consequences leaving another brother or sister wounded. Personal agendas and allegiances will compete against our mission to grow deep in Christ and celebrate by reaching out to our neighbor. Satisfying our own wants and desires will veer the ship off course. Failing to see this one body for the gift it is will only further exasperate the struggles of those beyond our walls to see this body as a gift and relevant in the world.

We may even ask ourselves, "Is this one body worth it?" Of course, it is, because the One who frees the prisoners, turns blindness into sight, preaches the gospel, heals every dread disease, calms the storms and feeds thousands with the very bread of peace is at the head of this one body.ⁱⁱ He is its gift. He sees its hurt and comes alongside that hurt and rescues it from that hurt. He sees the leprosy that tears at the flesh of this body. He sees the one wondering how this month's mortgage will be paid. He sees the one no longer connected to the other nine. He sees the one student

left out and questioning is this life worth it? He sees the one who just received the diagnosis of a severe medical ailment. He sees the one who cares for another and needs respite themselves. He sees the one coping with the death of a child. He sees the one praying the harvest will be plentiful to pay the bills. He sees the one separated from another. He sees the one who no longer sees themselves as God does or the ones whom the world or even the one body may no longer see as God does – very good!

He sees this body, every body, and he gives his life to save it. Rescue it. Redeem it. Resurrect it. Jesus, this one body, is the world's gift. He sees you dear church. He loves you. He heals you. We are the one body, called, gathered, and sent all the while rejoicing and giving thanks and praise to the One who breaks the darkness with a liberating light. Amen.

ⁱ Dr. Shauna Hannan, Craft of Preaching Seminar, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, sermon on Luke 17:11-19 delivered October 14, 2019.

ⁱⁱ Words from hymn "Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness" #843 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* hymnal (Augsburg Fortress). Text: Rusty Edwards. Music: J. Wyerth, *Repository of Sacred Music*, Part 11, 1813 © 1987 Hope Publishing Company. Reprinted under OneLicense.net A-726405