

**Pilgrim Church of Duxbury  
November 13, 2016  
Rev. Peggy O'Connor  
Luke 17:11-18  
Thank You**

What do you hear in this morning's story? Ten lepers cried out to Jesus asking to be healed. All ten were healed. One, a Samaritan, returned to say thank you. Where, asks Jesus, are the other nine? What do you hear in this story?

All too often I think we hear this story, and others like it, as criticism to us for not thanking God enough for all the gifts in our lives. We recognize ourselves in the nine who kept going and find ourselves wanting when we compare ourselves to the one who returned to say thank you. And so we sink a bit in our seats...hanging our heads, either literally or figuratively in shame. Words like ungrateful and unfaithful pop into our heads and hearts.

Well we could go there but this morning I want us to look at this in a different way. I want us to look through the eyes of the Samaritan. You see, the problem with many Bible stories is that we find it hard to relate to the people in them. They lived so very long ago. Their culture is not ours. Their language...their customs...their beliefs...their fears...all are foreign to us. It is hard for us to imagine their lives. So we read or hear the story and glean what we can then move on to the next story.

It is easy to think of the lepers in this morning's passage as characters rather than real people. After all, there are no more Samaritans and who

gets leprosy anymore? It is like a fictitious story. Except it isn't. So let's see if we can bring this man to life...and in the process make the story come alive for us.

This morning I am going to tell you the story of Aaron, the man who returned to thank Jesus for healing him...or rather...Aaron is going to tell you his story...the story I imagine when I hear this passage.

Hello, my name is Aaron. I live in a village on the border of Galilee and Samaria. My wife and I have five children, three sons and two daughters. As the eldest of five brothers I became the head of my father's household when he died several years ago. My brothers and I, and our families, all work together to grow and manage our herds and crops and we have been quite successful. God has been good to us...except for one year.

A few years after my father died I noticed a spot on my arm. I put olive oil on it and thought it would go away. But it didn't go away. In fact more spots appeared...on both arms. Before long I could not hide them. Someone must have noticed them because a runner came to the house one afternoon telling me to present myself to the local priest. When I did he asked to see my arms. When he saw the rash he said the word I had been dreading...leprosy.

He told me to leave the village immediately. I could not go home but would be escorted through the village gates and would have to stay there as long as I had the leprosy. He would send word to my family and they could

leave clothes and food for me outside the gate every day but they could not come near me. I did as I was told. When my wife came to the gate I could only wave and smile and tell her everything would be alright...even though I knew it wouldn't. I cried myself to sleep that night.

I hoped the leprosy would clear up quickly but weeks turned into months and I began to lose hope. Then...one day...I was sitting with some other lepers when we saw a group of people coming down the road. We got up to get a look at who was coming but the gatekeeper told us to keep back. I asked who it was and he said it was someone named Jesus. As we walked away I remembered hearing about this man. What was it? I remembered! He was a healer! I turned to the other lepers and said "let's ask him for help" Joab said, "why should he heal us? We are Samaritans. He is a Jew." Jacob said, "I hear he works miracles." Isaac said "No Jew is going to help us. They will probably set the dogs on us if we open our mouths. Nothing but a miracle will help us" That's when I shouted out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" It was an impulse...a hope born of desperation.

Nothing happened. My friends laughed at me. "What did we tell you." I started to turn away when Jesus yelled back, "Go show yourselves to the priests." What? The only reason to go to the priests would be to be found clean and able to go home. Jacob said there was no point to it...but we all started running toward the temple. As we ran I glanced at Joshua and saw that the sores on his face were gone. Was I seeing things? I looked at my

own arms and the spots were gone! "I am clean I screamed." The others looked at me and then at themselves and we all started yelling...and jumping up and down as we ran.

As I ran I thought about hugging my wife and my children and I remembered the last time I had held my youngest. She had hugged me to thank me for a toy I had made for her. That's when I realized I had not thanked Jesus for healing us. I said to the others, "we forgot to say thank you to Jesus" but they said "there's plenty of time for that...first we have to show ourselves to the priests." But I knew that once we were declared clean we would each run home. There would be celebrations and Jesus would be long gone by the time we had the time to go thank him. So I turned around and went back. When I found Jesus I thanked him. He told me my faith had healed me...but I did not understand what he meant.

Over the following weeks I got back into the rhythm of the household and things started to feel "normal". But I noticed that my eldest son would watch me out of the corner of his eye. I knew he was worried I might get sick again. So I began asking him, "how do I look today?" After a moments pause to check me out, he would reply, "Your lookin' good Dad" to which I would reply, "Thank you Jesus, thanks be to God."

That was years ago but you know, we still say this every morning? It has become a habit, a ritual. Lookin' good...thank you Jesus, thanks be to God. My neighbors, when they first heard this were critical of me. Jesus, they

would say...the Jew? How can you be thankful for a Jew. I would say, because I met him...he healed me...and I thanked him then and I thank him every day of my life.

Ok, so that is my imagined story about the Samaritan leper who returned to thank Jesus for healing him. What's the point of making up the story? It is just this. When we read these ancient stories we have no true understanding of the people. We need to bring them to life...to give them lives...and to get to know them. We need to see and understand them. Otherwise we just judge them.

We tend to identify with the Jews...they are after all our religious ancestors. But we also see that they hated any number of enemies and sought their extinction. As for the Samaritans, we feel sorry for the prejudice they faced...but we also wonder about them.

By bringing the people in the stories alive we see that they are not so very dissimilar from ourselves. We see that that they loved their families; they struggled with health issues; they worked hard to support themselves; they had deep faith; they worried about their children and the future. Even Samaritans and a host of other enemies had the same pressures and worries as we have today. This knowledge opens us up the revelation that we are they and they are us...or to quote the old Pogo comic strip...we have met the enemy and he is us.

In the after math of our recent election, which has left us as polarized as we were before the election...if not more so...we need to meet our enemies and all those whom we look at as 'other'. All the themes of the world: the poor and the rich and everyone in between; the Democrats, Republicans, and Independents; those who voted and those who did not; the young, the old; blue collar, white collar and no collar people; people of all colors; people of all nations; people of every gender identity; and people with varying levels of education...you get the point. We are them and they are us. We just don't know their stories and they don't know ours. We think we do but we don't...unless we get to know them.

So, who are our themes? How can we find them? How can we get to know them? The only thing we stand to lose is our ability to call them them. And coincidentally, it is what they stand to lose as well. Imagine the strength of this nation if we could all become a we? Now that, would indeed be something to fight for. Perhaps after all this is a fitting message for veterans day.