

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost – Year C
October 13, 2019
Deacon Cindy Roehl
Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, FL

- SERMON -

I cannot start this sermon without sharing with you what a few of us from Good Shepherd experienced this weekend. Pastor Becky and I were joined by your delegates for convention and a few others from here at Good Shepherd and we went to Punta Gorda and attended the Annual Convention of our Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida.

Along with seeing some old friends and some really great workshops, the Friday night Eucharist service was wonderful.

And I've got to say that Bishop Dabney Smith's talks were, for me, powerful. The theme of this convention comes in the words of Bishop Smith who reminded us of when "Jesus said about himself, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12), and Jesus said to those who believed in him, 'You are the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14)." Bishop Smith continued, "Briefly, we see the world truly, as it is, in the divine presence of Christ Jesus. And other people see the world, truly, through our faithful following of Jesus. That purpose of true vision requires our discipleship responsibility."

In one of his messages he talked about how people are drawn to the light, that light of Christ which transforms our world – my world and maybe your world - from chaos to order and from brokenness to healing.

I believe that's why we're here this morning. We are drawn together to worship in community where we can thank, love, and praise our God.

Even when our world is topsy-turvy, and things just aren't going as we felt it should? When we follow him, get close to him, we discover that he will guide us (or carry us) even through the roughest of times.

All three of our readings today give examples of people trusting God. Starting with our first reading where the people of Israel had been captured and taken in captivity to Babylon. They were disheartened and fearful. But the prophet Jeremiah told them, in spite of their captivity, to "build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. Get married and have children; help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they too may have children. Increase in number."

In other words, don't bury yourselves in anger and fear of what will happen to you. Trust God and be thankful for what you have. And scripture says they did just that.

And then there's our gospel reading this morning with the ten men who had a skin disease. Leprosy in Biblical times was a terrible thing. We're not exactly sure what Biblical leprosy was. While it may have described what is known today as "Hansen's Disease," the word probably included other skin diseases, as well. Whatever it was, once a person caught it, it was considered incurable, and those diagnosed with leprosy were banned from society.

Leviticus 13 says, "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' (*to warn people passing by to stay away.*) As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:45-46).

While early Israelites didn't operate on the Germ Theory of disease, they understood something about infectious diseases, and those suspected of leprosy were kept isolated until their diagnosis was confirmed (Leviticus 13:5). But the loathing directed at lepers was not merely fear of a disease. Leprosy made a person ritually unclean. To touch a leper defiled a Jew almost as much as touching a dead person.

Our reading starts with the Jesus traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. So, Jesus is just outside of the village and he meets a group of lepers. It wasn't uncommon for lepers to group together. They can't have much social contact with the "clean" members of society, so they form their own society of the "unclean," the "untouchables." And being just outside a village would be common, since they probably obtain food from family members or those in the village who have pity on them. Since they have no land to till, no livestock to look after, they are dependent upon others.

When Jesus and his band of disciples draw near, it says, "Keeping their distance from him, they raised their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, show us mercy!'" (17:12b-13)

The lepers ask for mercy, a familiar cry that they have probably been uttering ever since they were diagnosed with leprosy and cast out of the village. They don't ask for healing but for mercy/pity, for whatever Jesus might give them -- food, clothing, shelter, whatever he decides to offer. They know Jesus' reputation for compassion. But do they really ask for and expect healing? The text, at least, doesn't indicate so.

But then it says, "When Jesus saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' As they left, they were cleansed."

The significance of the priests in Jesus' instruction is that, according to Jewish law, only priests can declare a person healed of leprosy -- clean, and fit to re-enter society (Leviticus 14). Jesus doesn't say that they ARE healed, but certainly implies it. Therefore, they must go to receive a clean bill of health from the official who can grant it -- the priests.

Verse 14b is the key to understanding what happened. "And as they went, they were cleansed." Or, put another way from the Greek wording, "in the going, they were cleansed." Had they said, "That's illogical -- look at us." But instead, they believed Jesus and, in faith, ***started walking*** toward the village to find the priests, and received their healing as a result.

I can envision while they were walking, they started looking at one another and noticing the healing had taken place. I bet they picked up their pace quickly, don't you, heading to the priests with *enthusiasm!* But one of them went back, to Jesus. It says, "One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a *loud* voice. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him."

And oh, how thankful he must have been!

And then, later, in the book of Acts, we see how Peter and John came up to a man who had been crippled since birth. He thought they were going to give him money or something to eat. He was totally dependent on other people. But, when Peter said to him, "I don't have any money, but I will give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, stand up and walk!" And do you know what he did?

I'll tell you what he didn't do. He didn't look at them and say, "You must be kidding. I've been crippled all my life. There's no way I can get up and walk." He didn't do that.

As followers of Christ, as disciples of Christ, I believe Peter and John reflected the light and goodness of Christ. And apparently the crippled man believed them, because he got up – when he could have sat there! But scripture says, "At once his feet and ankles became strong.

Jumping up, (*he didn't just get up – he JUMPED up!*) he began to walk around. He entered the temple with them, walking, leaping, and praising God." Oh my gosh, can you see it? He was so thankful! He was walking and jumping – for the very first time - and praising God.

Have you ever had someone do something good for you and you forgot to thank them? It's important to be thankful. Especially to the One who brings order out of chaos and healing out of brokenness.

And when I say healing, there are different kinds of healing, aren't there? Not just physical healing, but when we're hurting or disappointed or fearful, we can find healing in the comfort God gives.

You know one good way we can find healing and comfort? Amazingly, it's in doing good for others.

As Bishop Smith reminded us this weekend, "Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12), AND he said to those who believed in him, 'You are the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14). We see the world truly, as it is, in the divine presence of Christ Jesus and other people see the world, truly, through our faithful following of Jesus. The Bishop said, "That purpose of true vision requires our discipleship responsibility."

As disciples, we would want to imitate who we follow, don't we? John 10:30 says, "Jesus went about doing good..." Do you know that "doing good" can provide a healing of its own?

Remember the 29 Gifts that Pastor Becky has talked about the last couple weeks?

In a letter from Mbali Creazzo she shares the history of the 29-day giving ritual that inspired this project. She says:

“The ritual of giving 29 gifts in 29 days came to me when my life was in a place of scarcity. I had been laid off from a job of eight years that I loved, and I feared I would lose everything.

When I went to one of my teachers ... during a challenging time in my life, I remember feeling that to give at this time seemed more an act of recklessness on my part than kindness to others. I also recall feeling fearful about “giving up” what little I believed I had to call my own. But as a risk taker, I decided to embrace the 29-day giving ritual with an open heart.

During this meeting my teacher told me that one of my gifts should be to a homeless woman on the street. My teacher said I would know the woman when I saw her.

I carried the specific sum of money of cash in the car, and one evening I finally saw the woman I thought was “the one” after scanning the streets every day for a week. I was on my way home at midnight after a long, stressful day working in a homeless shelter. I felt I had given more than enough during my shift at work, and frankly, I felt resentful about having to give more that night. I could have easily gone home to my warm bed, but something told me to see this through.

It took me a while to find a place that served food that was still open. ...

When she went to find the woman, she had to drive around a bit because the woman had walked some but Mbali said:

When I handed the food and the wad of dollar bills to this woman, something profound happened for me. I was overwhelmed with humility and felt very comforted and peaceful. I also felt a rush of energy that refueled my spirit that, less than one hour ago, felt drained. I was curious as to why I felt so good afterward. Giving that night felt like a gift to me. When I reflected on it later, I came to this realization that when I am in service to another person, I am moving from a place of self-centeredness to selflessness. The act of giving inherently carries gratitude in it. For me, it is impossible to give without feeling grateful

When that woman took her meal and money from my hand, I realized how much I did have. Just a week earlier, I was in a deep place of scarcity. I now felt instantly abundant. I did not have to walk the streets or sleep in the cold with nowhere to shower. I was not hungry, nor did I have to beg for money every day to survive. Last week I was feeling lost, scared, angry and sorry for myself, yet offering this simple gift made me feel so

much more alive. I remember going home that night and getting on my knees to give thanks. ...

And she said her life changed that night.

If God has been good to you, give him praise. If he has brought order to your chaos, give him praise. If he has given healing to your brokenness, give him praise.

And if you can provide help to someone, do so, and give him praise.

You are the light of the world. We are here to Christ's light through us and go about doing good...

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