

Sermon and Prayers for Sunday, October 9, 2022 + 18th Sunday after Pentecost
Bishop William O. Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, dear people of God, from God our creator through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus goes through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

It's important to remember that although Samaritans had similar roots as many of the Jewish people living in Galilee, over time the Samaritans had developed some of their own religious traditions, emphasizing devotion to Torah and affiliation with the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim near Shechem. On the other hand, as much of Galilee converted to Judaism, Galilean Jewish people tended to recognize the Jerusalem temple as the proper place of cultic worship. That meant that there was a middle region of Samaria that was isolated between two Jerusalem affiliated populations.

The relationship between the Jewish people of Galilee and those of the people of Samaria were not good, and Samaritans were often looked down upon in part for worshiping in the wrong place. By the time of Jesus' day, the hostility towards Samaritans was strong enough that some Galilean pilgrims often bypassed Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, even though it added considerable time to the journey.

Luke tells us that Jesus was making his way through the area between Samaria and Galilee. He was on neither Samaritan nor Galilean land, but on a borderland, a threshold place. And there, Jesus discovers people in need. In this case, ten lepers apparently living in a village on the borderland, neither in Samaria nor Galilee. As Jesus discovers these people in need, Jesus, because he's Jesus, because he is the Son of God, because he is the one sent by God, Jesus makes that borderland into a liminal space, that is, a space of transition to something new and good. Jesus makes a sacred place of that borderland as He walks with those who live and wander there.

Jesus offers healing and hope, reconciliation and renewal, to those who seek mercy. Jesus walks the borderlands with those who find themselves wandering or living there through sickness or disease, through broken relationships. There in the borderlands are many who are wandering, looking for a home, a place of welcome, many who are wondering about their faith in God, their faith in the church, their faith in humanity. On the borderlands who's in and who's out

bump up against each other, leaving too many people without a home, without being in anywhere.

The borderland is that line between heaven and hell that runs right through the cross. There on the cross Jesus takes all of the pain and sorrow and exclusion and suffering that he discovers and accompanies in the borderland with him to the cross. And of that place of death, Jesus makes a sacred place. From there, Jesus moves into the borderland of Holy Saturday, descends to the dead, as we confess.

And then in the power of God, the one who sent him, Jesus is raised up from the dead, to return to walking those borderlands with resurrection life. Jesus returns to those places where people wander and wonder, are left out and left alone, to walk with them. And Jesus takes along with him those who have died with him and risen with him in holy baptism, those who are marked with his cross, the cross of the borderlands, and sealed with his Spirit that makes even borderlands sacred places where people can find new life.

In this story from Luke, it's interesting that in some ways a double outsider, a Samaritan and a leper, is the one who comes from the margins, welcomed and healed by Jesus, to be a model of faithful living in response to what Jesus does. This one returns to praise God and thank Jesus. This former leper acknowledges Jesus as the one who has healed him, has made him well, restored him to community.

And then, having returned to praise God and thank Jesus, this one is told by Jesus, "Get up and go." Go and share with others what has happened to you. Go back into those borderlands to walk with others and share with them the new, abundant, and lasting life that I have given to you and offer for all.

It's not a bad rhythm for us: Our times of worship and devotion are opportunities to return to Jesus, to thank Jesus, to praise God for the new life that Jesus offers through forgiveness and faith, the hope and healing that rise from the empty tomb.

And then we get up and go. We rise from our knees to go out and share the good news of Jesus with any and all we meet. To dare in the power of the Holy Spirit and trusting the grace of God to go to the borderlands, to be with those who are excluded, suffering, seeking mercy, to point to the crucified and risen Jesus who is there with them in the borderlands offering life.

As someone has said, the good news of this encounter is that it carries with it the promise that through Jesus, God both reaches people in the boundaries and empowers people to step across boundaries, to share mercy with outsiders, to pay attention to things worthy of praise, and to move forward into God's future, together, with the assurance that there is more to God's story than meets the eye.ⁱ

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayersⁱⁱ

In gratitude and humility, let us pray on behalf of all of God's creation, saying "Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great."

A brief silence.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for bishops, pastors, and deacons and all other ministers and leaders of the church. Inspire leaders of the church to proclaim your mighty deeds, that your saving faith may be known to all. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Majestic God, we give you thanks for land and water, seedtime and harvest. Break down boundaries we construct between ourselves and the rest of your creation. Bring renewal and restoration to places affected by pollution and deforestation. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Mighty God, we give you thanks for those in our communities, nation, and world who work for justice and peace. Guide those who govern to act on behalf of those marginalized by race, ethnicity, or religion. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Merciful God, we give you thanks that you hear the cries of those in need. Restore to community those who are stigmatized by illness, feel rejected, or who live in isolation. Send healing to all who suffer (especially we name now, silently and aloud). Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Faithful God, we give you thanks for the healing ministries of congregations and other communities across this synod. Equip those who visit, care, and pray for the sick. Give insight to doctors, nurses, home health aides, and all practitioners of medical arts. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Eternal God, we give you thanks for your faithful people who have gone before us to your glory. Renew our trust in your eternal promises of mercy, redemption, and new life. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

With grateful hearts we commend our spoken and silent prayers to you, O God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

ⁱ Audrey West, *Working Preacher*, 10/9/2016.

ⁱⁱ Scripture reprinted and prayers adapted from Sundays and Seasons (<https://www.sundaysandseasons.com>)