

In the gospel this morning, Jesus is continuing on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus is on a journey, moving through all regions in the land of Israel, the Holy Land of the Hebrew people. His journey as presented in the gospel of Luke does not proceed in a straight line. He does not move directly from Galilee to Jerusalem without a pause. He does not stay strictly within Jewish geo-political boundaries. He is not afraid to venture into foreign territories. Neither does he stay within the boundaries of Jewish religion and tradition. He is not afraid to encounter people that have been identified as “unclean.” This journey that Jesus is on cannot be mapped in a linear fashion. It also cannot be contained spatially. This journey that Jesus is on transcends human understanding. It defies our instinctive desire to chart and categorize events.

This journey that as Luke describes it enlarges the scope of Jesus’ teaching and healing ministries beyond the journeys set out in Mark and Matthew. It recalls for us and for the Hebrew listeners that in Hebrew tradition serious teaching takes place before something momentous happens. For example, after Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt in the book of Exodus and before the newly liberated followers enter into the Promised Land in Deuteronomy, Moses delivered a series of serious

teachings to them. He wanted to make sure his people understood what was expected of them before they entered the Promised Land. He wanted them to know how to survive without him because he knew he would not be going with them.

In the reading we heard this morning, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. We know from scripture and tradition what is going to happen to Him in Jerusalem. *He knows* what is going to happen to him in Jerusalem. Luke intentionally emphasizes this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem because there are some serious teachings that happen along the way in the form of encounters that Jesus has. These encounters carry significant meaning for Jesus' followers. These encounters carry significant meaning for us.

So let's take a look at the encounter included in the gospel reading today. This encounter occurred on the edges, the fringe of the acceptable territory where Hebrew people could legitimately do business. I guess for us today that might translate to doing business right on the border with Mexico. It was a little bit sketchy to be there. But it was the only place where people who were shunned from society could go. Being in sketchy territory caused Jesus no trepidation while those who were following him

were likely holding their robes a little more tightly around them; likely maintaining a VERY safe distance between them and the unclean people who lurked around them.

The unclean people were practically invisible in the first century world. They were lepers. Their skin was diseased so their unclean-ness would have been very visible. People would have avoided them the way we avoid people who sleep on park benches or people who stand on busy corners with signs. They were cursed people who just had to figure out how to survive on their own. They were people like the people in our world today who are visibly distinctly different from the norm. They were people that were painful to look at because no one wanted to be like them, no one wanted to catch what they had. No one wanted to have to lower themselves to the level of the suffering the lepers had to live with. So they sent them away. Out of sight, out of mind.

Something quite surprising and quite unusual happened when Jesus came near them. The ten lepers begged him for mercy, Jesus saw them and sent them to their priests to receive the blessing of being declared clean. They went, like he told them to, and were healed on the way there. But that wasn't the surprising and unusual part. The surprising and unusual

part was that one of the lepers grasped that what had happened was more than being made clean.

When Luke uses the expression “Jesus saw them,” he means more than that Jesus perceived their physical presence. He means that Jesus is aware of the whole being ness of the thing seen. Do you recall the story from a couple of weeks ago when Jesus saw Nathanael under a fig tree? When Jesus saw Nathanael, his eyes perceived his presence but he also perceived the enormity of Nathanael’s soul. Jesus perceived that Nathanael knew him and had faith in him. And because of that faith Jesus told Nathanael that he would see greater things than this.

When Jesus saw the lepers in this sketchy neighborhood between Samaria and Galilee he perceived the enormity of their suffering and the hope contained in their humanity. Nine of the lepers accepted the cleansing and were likely grateful for being able to rejoin society. But the one leper, after being declared clean by his priest, returned to the place where Jesus was with enormous gratitude and vocal praise for what God had done. He recognized that God’s grace had been made available to him even though he had done nothing, absolutely nothing to deserve it. This leper “saw” Jesus, he realized that Jesus had made the enormity of God’s grace

available to him, a despised Samaritan and he was overcome with gratitude for it.

The other nine lepers were likely not ungrateful. Just like we are not ungrateful for God's grace. But I wonder how much we box up God's grace as something that is contained exclusively in church rituals and traditions. Did the other nine accept the cleansing and the ritual blessing and return to society and then just continue with life as usual? Do we accept God's grace on Sunday and then go about life as usual, unaware that we daily receive the grace of God Almighty?

I can certainly identify with the nine who accepted the grace given and embraced re-entry into normalcy. I've never lived as one shunned on the edge of society, but I have carried around imperfections that weighed me down. Whether they were visible to the naked eye didn't matter. Maybe they were, maybe my demeanor made the imperfections quite plain. But I found that when I asked for mercy and was given the grace to be cleansed, I did not feel elation. I felt relief, but even if I felt like leaping for joy I would refrain from doing it - at least in public.

But now, as I stand here, I feel utterly awed by the limitless vastness of God's mercy for us. We are God's beloved created children and we are

here, I believe with all my heart, to bring about God's mercy and love and justice in this world. I believe that God sent Jesus to be with those ten lepers that day so that they would be able to sense that God knows intimately what it is to be human and loves us in spite of our own perceived lesions and frailty. God knows our flesh is necessary to provide our hearts souls with hands and feet. And for this we give God our thanks, hopefully our enormous, ebullient thanks.

We can show God our gratitude by worshiping faithfully as a community and by seeing, really seeing, the gift that he gave us in his son Jesus Christ. And when we see Jesus, really see Jesus, we can see and maybe even hear him calling for us to follow him on his journey. He is asking us to make His journey our own. We make it our own by journeying with Jesus through the cross not stopping at the foot of it. We journey with Jesus straight through the cross, die to ourselves and rise in full life with Christ. We emerge whole through our individual baptisms into Christ's resurrection. Through baptism and participation in Holy Communion we are able to live a full life in and through Jesus.

We make Christ's journey *our* journey (yours, mine and Jesus's) by bringing others along the journey with us; bringing them along not by force,

by dictate or by dogma but by really seeing and being with each other. We go forward on our journey because our faith in God's vast, unlimited and unbridled grace has made us well.

For *that* we say out loud and with enthusiasm, "Thanks be to God."