

October 11, 2017 The Odds Luke 17:11-19

There are times when I feel like I must be a crotchety, old, man. And I do not know whether there is a virus of crotchability in the air but I feel like I am infected as we mark this year's Thanksgiving weekend. I think what set me off was a comment I heard on the radio. The announcer was ending her segment of programming, and I would never think of starting my day without hearing the part of her segment of air time, as I enjoy my breakfast. The discussions she leads most of the time I find thought provoking. Her program helps me shake off the last cobwebs of sleepfulness, normally. Her final comment stuck in my throat like a piece of dry bread. She said, "Enjoy your thanksgiving weekend. Have a joyful and abundant time!"

I know that across the country and throughout our province, Thanksgiving, is a time of feasting. I understand that it is a time when families and friends gather around the feast. I know the table will be laden with a wide variety of vegetables, the turkey will be served, and there are alternatives to turkey. The desserts will be special. As our extended family gets together there will be two pies that will be served, as a direct result of the ham supper and pie auction here at the church. Our children will join us. I have always said we are singularly blessed that we can share this particular weekend.

But I am pretty firm in my conviction that the celebration is not simply about abundance, or the joy that comes of being able to share in a feast characterized by choice and abundance. Thanksgiving weekend focuses on the giving of thanks. And that begs the question, to whom are we thankful? That's my rant. But I want you to notice what the Scripture teaches us. The odds have always been such that giving thanks to God could easily be forgotten in the midst of great blessing.

You have heard me say many times that every one of the four Gospels focuses the majority of its words in print on the last week of Jesus ministry and thereabouts. Here in Luke 17, Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. The first thing to be recognized is that Jesus is on the way to that final week that begins with Palm Sunday and concludes in His death and burial. It was the first day of the new week on which HE rose from the dead: what we call Easter Sunday! So Jesus is on the way to trial, arrest, pain and death. He is about to give Himself for the salvation of many.

The journey to Jerusalem in Jesus time is not unlike the journey to Jerusalem in modern day. In Jesus time it meant walking close to the borders of Galilee where the balance of His 3 years of ministry took place, and the border of Samaria. The Samaritans were not just a different kind of Jew. They were Gentiles. They were regarded as foreigners. Their customs were different, and their religion was different. Their culture was Samaritan. They are Gentiles. A very real parallel would be the distinction that would be made between Palestinians and Jews today in Israel. The road that Jesus is travelling along with HIS disciples including the balance of about 120 followers, the road takes them near the border of Samaria.

And the road goes through villages along the way. Jesus is not stopping to do ministry in this village. HE is passing through. The focus is on Jerusalem and all that awaits HIM there. Jesus is focused on the cross. But as Jesus approaches the entry to this village, HE is still outside its boundaries, HE is approached by 10 men. They have leprosy. It was regarded as the plague of the time. It was assumed that it was communicable. That a person who had leprosy was a threat to everyone else. That is why these leprous men were outside the village. They are part of the Leper colony associated with this village. They probably are living at and around the garbage dump that was associated with this village. These men have heard about Jesus. They know HIM by name from HIS ministry in Galilee. They know HE has the power to heal. They have heard the miracle stories. They raise a hue and cry. "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" The KJV says their cry was, "Master have mercy on us."

There is an ancient liturgical responsive saying in the church. The leader says, "Lord have mercy." The congregation responds, "Christ have mercy." I mention that because as I said a moment ago, these lepers recognize Jesus. HE is a celebrity. These lepers have probably heard the story of the Good Samaritan. They have heard about the healing of the blind, and the deaf. They have heard about Jesus as one who cleanses lepers. Word of mouth is still the most successful kind of advertising. Because people talk to one another, and because of the proximity of Samaria to Galilee, they have probably heard of Jesus raising the dead! The daughter of Jairus, Lazarus, and the healing of the servant of that Roman centurion, the servant of a Gentile.

Master have pity on us! Lord have mercy on us! These 10 men with leprosy, outcasts, living in poverty and separated from the balance...not only of their community...but their families and loved ones...they perceive an opportunity for life here. Surely this is God's gift of an opportunity for life. They were not born yesterday. If a fraction of what they have heard about Jesus is true....the force is strong in this ONE. The Spirit of God is power to save people like us in this ONE. "Master, have mercy on us!" The words of an old hymn come to mind, "While on others you are calling, Do not pass me by." Please, please, please...heal us too!

There is distance between these Samaritan lepers and Jesus. They did not rush at him. That distance is an indication of their respect for Jesus, and the reality of their lot. Jesus did not simply pass by on the other side of the road. HE calls to them, "Go, and show yourselves to the priests." To their priests in their religion, in their culture. Jesus has not bidden them to become Jews. He knows that in their village as in Nazareth, the priests would be the gate keepers to being recognized as clean and allowed to rejoin the community. And Luke who is a physician tells us as they went to their priests, they were made whole. They were cleansed. Their flesh was restored. A miracle! New life.

One of these ten men, one of them, when he saw that he was healed of the life destroying leprosy, came back, praising God in a loud voice. This guy is shouting something like hallelujah! He throws himself at the feet of Jesus and he gives thanks...this Samaritan is on his knees before Jesus who is a Jew. Jesus asks the question that speaks to my soul on this very

special weekend of the Fall season. “Were not all 10 cleansed?” Were not all of you blessed? Was no one found to give thanks to God but this one foreigner? The implication is that some of those lepers were Jews? But even if they were not...did only one...a foreigner...a Gentile give God the glory, the praise and thanksgiving for what had occurred? Rise and go. Your faith has made you well. Your faith in God, as you bowed before Jesus. I tell you the truth. Many will share in the feast this weekend. The odds are only one in ten will thank God for the food.

So here is your homework assignment. Whether you are alone or surrounded by family and friends during the feast that is part of this weekend. Beat the odds. Take a moment to ask those with whom you share a meal to pray with you. Keep it simple. Make it short. This is not about rewriting the sermon. Say thanks to God for the blessings you enjoy. Say it in Jesus name. Give God your thanksgiving. And beat the odds on the road to Jerusalem.

Let us pray;

Lord God, revealed in your Son and with us in the sweetness of YOUR Spirit, we give you thanks for the blessings we enjoy this weekend. We will assemble with loved ones and friends. We will enjoy the food our living makes us free to purchase. The landscape of Canada will be visible to all of us. We will not be afraid to speak freely. For blessings we receive and have received at YOUR hand we give thanks to YOU. In Jesus name, Amen.