

Trinity 14 (10 September 2023)

“And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.”

+In the Name...

We buried Keith Miller from this parish yesterday. While it would be a misrepresentation to say that I “enjoy” doing funerals, it often gives a parish the opportunity to put our best foot forward: an opportunity to present a beautiful liturgy, accompanied by good music, punctuated by some of the most important passages in all of Holy Scripture. What’s more, those attending are often seeking a Christian message. I do not mean to imply that they are looking for a new church home, but they are looking for a hopeful message, perhaps THE message that can only come from the Gospel. As

opposed to a wedding, where those attending might be there to keep Grandma happy, or so they are not left out of the conversation at the reception when it turns to the flower girl who refused to walk down the aisle or the crazy hat the woman in the third row was wearing. In short, the average wedding crowd is not as interested in hearing the Gospel as the average funeral crowd, and so it can be challenging to be as welcoming. So it made my heart glad yesterday when during the reception a man introduced himself, explained that he was Jewish, and that he felt like he was most welcome at both the Requiem itself and the reception following. Of course, I had not known that he was Jewish, but it would not have changed anything in my planning even if I had.

Contrast that with one of the commentators whom I read while researching for this sermon. He opined that this lesson is obviously antisemitic because St. Luke's point is that the nine lepers who were

cured but did not return to give thanks to God were Jewish, thus pointing out the moral failings of a group of Jews. While he is technically correct that the nine were Jews, it is hardly surprising given that the parties involved were, in fact, in Israel! When I preach at this parish, I tend to use Portlanders in my examples because that is where we are. When I served a parish in Washington, DC, I used locals there as examples. (And if you don't think our federal government provides an endless supply of sermon material, then you have not spent enough time in our nation's capital!) I propose that the point St. Luke is trying to make is that first of all, only one of the ten followed instructions (former and current teachers pick up on such things), and second, the one who did do what he was supposed to do was the one from whom the listeners would have expected the least.

If you recall, just last Sunday we heard that famous parable: the Good Samaritan, particularly appropriate as we literally stand in the

shadow of Good Samaritan Hospital. Perhaps due to our close proximity to the hospital but also because of our long-standing relationship with this particular parable, we quite naturally think of a Samaritan as a good thing. We likely have heard of “Good Samaritan laws”, and so lose sight that in Jesus’ time this referred to a race of people that were hated by the Jews. To fully understand, we have to look at their history: as recorded in the First Book of the Kings, the nation of Israel was divided into two parts during the time of King Rehoboam. Israel included the ten tribes of the north, while Judah consisted of only the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah in the south. Jerusalem was in the Southern Kingdom and so it remained its capital, forcing the north to choose a new capital, Samaria, from which we get the name “Samaritan”. Immediately there was contention between the two kingdoms, and no real issues for division needed to present themselves other than “they’re not us”! But some legitimate reasons

did come about: Rehoboam would not allow his people to travel to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the temple, but instead set up idols within the northern kingdom. In addition, the Samaritans, contrary to God's commands in Deuteronomy, inter-married with the Assyrians, earning their offspring the descriptors of "dogs" or "half-breeds". Eventually the Samaritans would limit their canon of Scripture to only the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament, to the exclusion of the prophets and poetry. So by the time of Jesus, the audience had a knee-jerk reaction all ready to go should anyone be careless enough to utter the term "Samaritan". I have heard contemporary sermons carefully trying to explain what race or group of people would be used by Jesus today if he were telling this parable to 21st century Americans. Again, we are getting lost in the weeds.

Here is the point of this story: ten people were cured. They were not just given a prize, they did not just see improvement, but were

completely healed from a disease that would have caused them to be expelled from the community. Talk about getting a new lease on life! And then, after the cure they could not even be bothered to say “thank you”. Fr. Pennington, (God rest his soul+), sometime parish priest of St. Paul’s in Bend, used to say that atheism is the height of arrogance. Well, this episode runs a close second. To be charitable, we could chalk it up to carelessness instead.

But now that I have pointed fingers at others, do I myself remember to give thanks to God when it is due? Oh, I can pray for help or mercy or forgiveness all day long when there is something weighing on my mind, but am I as tenacious in giving thanks after the fact as I was in petitioning beforehand? For the nearly three weeks that my brother-in-law was in the hospital, I prayed every day for his healing. He was released on Friday and has now returned to Heppner. Will I be as conscientious in thanking God for David’s return to good

health as I was in asking for healing? I would like to think so, but probably not. It is easy for us to remember to turn to God in our hour of need, less so in the joys of Thanksgiving. That is not because we are white, or Christians, or Portlanders, but because we are fallen human beings. We are made whole by our faith, not because of any racial or social advantages we may possess. Notice, that it did not bother the Jews and the Samaritan to travel together when they all suffered from a common illness. Misery loves company, perhaps?

We can teach a child to say “thank you”, but that alone does not make him thankful in his heart. How then do we become truly thankful? By demonstrating God so unequivocally in our lives that it could not be interpreted as anything else but the power of His love. To quote St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.” What, after all, could make a father happier?

+In the Name...