SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, OCTOBER 12, 2025
2 KINGS 5:1-3, 7-15c; PSALM 111; 2 TIMOTHY 2:8-15; LUKE 17:11-19

JESUS THE BORDER WALKER

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

In 2018, I joined some teens and adults from St. Andrew's parish in an experience on the San Diego-Tijuana border that was sponsored by the Global Immersion Project – a group dedicated to Christian peacemaking along contentious borders in the world. Global Immersion contends that peacemaking is the essence of the Christian movement. The goal of the experience was to teach us how to become "everyday peacemakers." We were on the US – Mexican border, but some groups convened on the Israeli – Palestinian border. After spending several days in San Diego, we eventually crossed the border into Tijuana where we stayed in a migrant shelter. Most of the shelter guests were from Central America. They were hopeful and anxious as they prepared to enter the US as asylum seekers. We heard their stories – horrifying stories of trauma, abuse, violence, and injustice. Everyone we met was fleeing for their lives. No one was just casually

migrating to find "a better life." We met a woman who had not seen her children in years because she was deported back to Mexico, and her kids were left in the US. We spent time with a "Dreamer" who traveled to Mexico to attend his grandmother's funeral and couldn't get back to the US. He didn't have a passport for either country, had never been to Mexico before and didn't speak Spanish. A young mother and her child fled El Salvador because she could no longer afford to pay for protection from the local organized crime boss. She hoped to get to the US to be with her sister in Pennsylvania, but her sister was undocumented. We were told that her asylum case was weak even though she was convinced that returning to El Salvador meant certain death for her and her little girl. Yet she persisted – waiting, hoping and lingering the border.

From the first line of our Gospel today: "On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee." Jesus was on the border. It was nothing like the modern US-Mexico border. It was a permeable border maintained by centuries of hatred, mischaracterization, and distrust. The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans was old and entrenched. The two groups disagreed about everything that matters to them: how to honor God, how to interpret the scriptures, where to worship. They avoided social contact whenever possible, yet this is where Jesus appears. Jesus walks the border to teach us something about God. Jesus is a border-walker. And that reminded me of a powerful insight from poet Robert Bly from years ago: "On the borders is where one finds truth; at either side of the borders there may be certainties or doctrines, but not truth."[i] Jesus, Truth-Incarnate, lingers on the border.

On its face, our Gospel story this week is about thankfulness. It's a very popular scripture passage during stewardship season. But this Gospel story is about more than gratitude. It is about *the gratitude of a foreigner* who receives welcome. It is about identity—about exclusion and inclusion, exile and return. It's a story about the kingdom of God—about who is invited, who belongs, and who thrives in the realm where God dwells. What does it mean that in Christ, we are all one? How do we find God in the borderlands of our lives? Am I more a citizen of the Kingdom of God than I am of the United States? What does that mean? These are important questions.

It's also significant that the people who were healed today were lepers. As lepers, they live in the shadows and subsist in a no-man's-land, "a region between." According to the customs of the day, they live in seclusion, keep their distance from passersby, wear torn clothes and disheveled hair, and announce their own contagion in loud, humiliating cries: "Unclean! Unclean!"

So, when Jesus heals their leprosy, he doesn't merely cure their bodies; he restores their identities. He enables their safe return to all that makes us fully human – family, community, companionship, and intimacy. In healing their withered skin and numbed limbs, he releases them to feel again – to embrace and be embraced, to worship in community, to reclaim all the social and spiritual ties their disease steals from them. In other words, Jesus enters a border, a no-man's-land – a land of no belonging – and hands out ten unblemished passports. He invites ten exiles home.

Seen from this angle, the tenth leper's response to Jesus resonates differently. Yes, it's an expression of gratitude for healing. But it's also the expression of a deeper and truer belonging. According to Luke's text, the tenth leper is a Samaritan, a "double other" marginalized by both illness *and* foreignness.

What I see in the Samaritan's full-hearted praise and devotion is the intimate relationship between desperation and faith. Between yearning and gratitude. Between high stakes and deep love. Ten lepers are healed but only the one who has nowhere else to go, nothing left to lose, and everything in the world to gain, returns to Jesus. Only the one who can take nothing for granted falls in love. Only the one who longs to find a home for his whole self receives salvation. This is not a superficial "thank you." It is gratitude that wells up from the deepest caverns of his yearning and sorrow. I wonder if my annual pledge to St. Mark's would be different if I allowed it to percolate up from my deepest yearning and sorrow. The kind of gratitude that takes nothing for granted. The kind that notices how rare, how singular, and how gorgeous grace is when it comes to the borderlands and says, "Come on in. Yes, you. YOU." The kind that finds God's inclusive welcome stunning.

I wonder if the invitation of today's Gospel is to hang-out with Jesus on the borderlands. To become a spiritual border-walker. Maybe, if we find

gratitude difficult, we should interrogate the places in our lives where we feel most comfortable, most confident, most complacent, most bored. Maybe we should step instead into the places where *we're* the outsiders, alone and afraid. Maybe we should sit honestly with our most profound hungers. Maybe we should recognize once again how desperately we need Jesus to welcome our vulnerable souls and bodies home.

Ten lepers on the border stand at a dutiful distance and call Jesus "Master." One draws close, dares intimacy, and finds his truest self, clinging to Jesus for a better and more permanent citizenship. The tenth leper moves past politeness and finds compassion. He discovers what happens when gratitude spills over into love. May we do the same.

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[i] *Might Jesus be on the border? - Greater Northwest Area | News*, greaternw.org.

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