



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 23C, OCTOBER 9, 2022

JEREMIAH 29:1,4-7; PSALM 66:1-11; 2 TIMOTHY 2:8-15; LUKE 17:11-19

O, TO BE FULLY ALIVE!

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."*]

St Irenaeus was a second century bishop in what is now France. One of his most celebrated quotes is his belief that "A human being fully alive is the glory of God."¹ One way of understanding this is that a human being 'fully alive' makes manifest in the world, magnifies and amplifies in the world, albeit imperfectly, the

loving, healing and liberating power and reality of God.

To be 'fully alive' can be defined as being fully present and aware of *being*, rather than living in a state of distracted doing, distracted by our tasks and our busyness, distracted *from* the wondrous, the truly beautiful, and the miraculous that surrounds us. When we are 'fully

¹ *Adversus Haeresis*, IV. xx. 6, cf "The Early Christian Fathers" Ed. and trans by Henry Bettenson, (OUP: Oxford, 1956), 75.

alive,' we might more easily see extraordinary possibility as we experience the potential creativity of each moment in its fullness. Being 'fully alive' may not mean being completely unburdened of the things which cause us pain, rather, it's to maintain and hold a more expansive appreciation of the present in our awareness, *including* the action and reality of God in our lives.

Fortunately for those of us who find ourselves often distracted and caught up in the busyness of it all, even when we are completely oblivious to our deeper, inner reality, Scripture teaches that the Spirit dwelling within us is ceaselessly praying, longing for God on our behalf,² and this keeps the way open, offers us a path, should we choose to take it, right into fullness of life. And so, even in our noisy and distracted cultural realities *this* is our spiritual reality, this is the spiritual potential of our human life. What does it take for us to feel this, to really know this?

As Episcopalians, we hold that participating in a life patterned on the daily, weekly, and seasonal

cycles of prayer and worship forms us over time in this knowing. Such participation though calls for commitment, and life can all too easily present competing demands on our time and energy.

Thankfully for us, our lives are also full of miraculous moments, large and small, dramatic and mundane, moments that grasp our imagination, can shake up our understanding of reality, moments that *invite us* into fullness of life. I think today's gospel story can teach us something critical about that invitation and how we might come to accept it for ourselves, and know this fullness in our own lives.

The ten lepers who approached Jesus were, kind of like us, living in a noisy and distracting cultural reality, they were socialized and formed to behave in certain ways, to expect to live life in a certain way. The cause of their suffering was not only physical, but also social, and spiritual. They had been excluded from their community and from religious practice, two areas of life which have long taught that God *should* be placed at the center of all.

² Romans 8:26-27

The ten lepers approach and they call out to Jesus, giving voice to their desire to receive God's mercy and be healed, be restored. Jesus hears them and responds, and each one of them is healed.

Jesus heals because he was trusted and he was asked, his healing was unconditional. It wasn't *dependent* on any particular response from the ones who received his mercy, it was instead freely given, a response in love to those who were asking to be freed from their suffering.

All ten are healed... and nine respond in the way they've been taught, convention tells them to set-off and show themselves to the priests. This is not an inherently bad response, it's expected, it's tradition after all, but it can be interpreted here, perhaps, as being only a *partial* response.

One of those healed does something different. Seemingly struck by the insight that the glorious presence and power of God is at work in his life, this one man responds differently, he turns back and returns to Jesus, throwing himself on the ground before him, thanking him; this man is overwhelmed by the desire to praise and worship God,

and in so doing he accepts the invitation to participate in the embrace of love that is eternally initiated by God, within us and beyond us. And with that chosen response, with that accepted invitation into the fullness of God's love, surely nothing can ever be the same again for that man, because now both the reality and the potential of fullness of life in God has been both experienced *and importantly* it's been acknowledged.

This story is surely teaching us about the importance of *rightly* responding to God, teaching us something of the appropriate response to being lead from the wilderness of suffering into the Promised Land of wholeness and fullness of life. And, to paraphrase Moses, as he stood with the Israelites on the cusp of their long-awaited crossing into that Promised Land:

when things start going well, when you have the comforts you have been longing for, the life or the things or the people you have hoped and prayed for... Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God! Don't simply keep going, allowing yourself to be

drawn ever onward by convention, or cultural expectations, or ego, instead, accept God's invitation to live life fully.³

This man's healing encounter with Jesus teaches us the importance of turning back, of coming back to the Lord our God in praise and thanksgiving before doing anything else! To acknowledge and respond with praise and thanksgiving to our

own ongoing conversion of life, and to allow any new awareness of God's healing presence and action in our life, allow *that* to drive our thinking and our doing, to influence our decisions and our choices. Turn back, and *first* come back and respond to God, because fullness of life, it's an invitation, and it's ours to accept over and over again.

³ paraphrase based on Deuteronomy 8:6-15



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