

The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity- Gal. 5:6ff

Luke 17:11-17

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

There is a phrase that crept into our commonly used vocabulary many years ago, and it is likely that it derived from the gambling fraternity: “Hedging your bets”. It reflects the concern a gambler has about just how solid a position he is in when engaged with trying to win money or property. The more committed and certain a person is the more they are willing to take and live with risks. But the larger the stakes and the more uncertainty plays a roll, the more that person will attempt to find a way hold back something so as not to put all on the line. It is reminiscent of a silly joke about a conversation between a chicken and a pig over the relative merits of having a good breakfast of eggs and bacon to start the day. The hen is ecstatic and ebullient about her belief that no day should really begin without it. But the pig muses and replies, “that is all well and good for you; in your case it is just a matter of a loaning a little part of yourself. For me it represents a total commitment!”

The Gospel lesson for today, the story of the healing of the 10 lepers is both familiar and on the face of it, straight forward and simple. The easiest interpretation has us come away with a sense of how important it is to be truly thankful for what we have been given. And there is no doubt that this is pertinent and part of the meaning presented. But if we peel back the layers of the encounter Jesus has in this healing event, we may well find deeper and perhaps more powerful things to consider.

Luke goes to great effort to make this story uncomplicated. 10 outcasts who have contracted a terrible disease that literally eats away at the body, cry out for help and deliverance. Their condition leaves them cut off from family, community, friends, and even the most common of things, human touch. Simple comfort must have been a luxury. They are told to go to the very people, the priests, who they could not previously have had access to because their condition was hopeless and defiling. It is a strange command to be told to go where you would not have an entrance. It is like being told to go to a bank for a loan when your credit rating is in the tank! It heightens the fact that they have no resources of their own, personal or moral, to commend themselves to the very place they most need to find acceptance. **They are literally thrown on grace, because there is nothing else upon which to fall back or forward.** And this sets the stage for what is to come. On the way they are healed. We are not told how or why only that they receive an unimaginable gift that will make their future totally new. In some unexplainable way the dead end they have faced takes a detour. The message is clear: there are some places in life that no resource of our own will be adequate.

I doubt there are many or maybe even any in here who could not name your own leprosy, your own dead ends. How often do we carry those wounds and struggles in silence, thinking nothing can really touch them let alone offer restoration? We live with long standing relationships that are broken and we do not know how to repair them. We walk with lost hopes and dreams and wonder what sort of horizon will now call us forward. We encounter illness of body and soul that cause us to wilt even as we march on in quietly carried suffering. We raise children with all the love and effort that can be mustered and for reasons unknown and beyond our control they do the inexplicable, sometimes to the point of self-destructiveness. We know these lepers for their dilemma is also ours. At times even we cry out for healing. So far this story makes a certain sense to us for we share in it.

The story then takes a turn, and it is a vital one. One man recognizes the grace and gift he has received and comes back to give thanks. Notice, the fact the other 9 do not do so does not negate their healing. God is not driven to curse or reward us according to our gratitude; He is bigger than that. The twist here is that he comes to see what others have missed, namely that wholeness is not a matter of fitting God into life where it can be managed, or when our need is greatest, but rather that in everything and at every moment **he fits into God's life and gift.** His thankfulness is a sign that there is no hedging of his bets; no partial

relationship with God, but a disposition that sees his life in light of GRACE, not luck or fortune or just being in the right place at the right time. And Jesus tells him that this trust is what makes him really whole and complete. The actual healing becomes secondary.

This story invites us to stand in the same place. In fact we already do. Those things we cannot “fix” or make quite right; those struggles and secret sins we carry, and sometimes even the physical ailments that dog us, all too often become the guiding text and narrative of our lives. They become the way we present and define ourselves and life becomes framed by this, even our own sense of trust or distrust. I have a friend who will say, “if I have told you this before, hold up 2 fingers”. We can get into a rut or pattern of seeing our lives in light of the broken places, and then we began to ask, “Where is God in this?” This is an understandable and maybe a natural move. But notice what happens when we take that approach. Questions about “ME” move to the center of life. We begin to try and fit God into the places we think we need him, and he becomes a commodity who will fix what we want fixed—in short we begin to hedge our bets. We look for the answers and explanations that address little segments of our lives, but that do not ask us to trust God to be the Center. This Gospel is about much more than etiquette. It tells us that we do not explain or fit God in where we have space and time, rather God explains and defines us. When we get that we quit trying to be the center and may well find surprises of healing and grace we could not see before. This is what wholeness is about. Having complete and full lives is nothing more than standing gratefully in God's presence trusting that the relationship He wants with us is one of intimacy, friendship, and love in every situation. It is coming to see that ‘who’ we are, with assets and deficits, wellness and illness, joys and sorrows are taken into the relationship He has made with us in Baptism and continues throughout life. When God is what life revolves around we can look in the mirror and see reflected back an image. It is not the one we may expect, one marked by our brokenness, but the one which shows us how God sees us-whole and complete. Amen+