

Yr. C, Proper 23  
October 9, 2022  
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan  
Christ Episcopal Church  
1554 Words

Lessons: 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c  
Psalm 111  
2 Timothy 2:8-15  
Luke 17:11-19

There were two ways Galileans like Jesus could travel to Jerusalem. They could go *around* Samaria by way of the Jordan River Valley to the east or they could ‘hold their noses’ and go straight *through* Samaria. Ugh, the Samaritans! Who wants to be around *them*? Jesus does. St. Luke informs us that Jesus was going *through* the region, not around it.

And Jesus enters the village from the filthy side first, where there are ten lepers who’ve been banished from the heart of town. They are outcasts...unemployed...destitute. In a word—worthless...except maybe they are *worse* than worthless, because lepers are also dangerous, and everybody knows it.

So, the lepers call out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” At first *his reply* seems strange. “Go,” Jesus says, “and show yourselves to the priests.” You see, part of the job of the priests was to judge cleanliness. This would be an easy, open-and-shut case. Leprosy was nasty. Leprosy was hopeless, because leprosy was *forever*.

I think Jesus is actually having a little fun at the expense of the local priests. He wants *them* to be the first to see what *God is really up to* with the outcasts.

Before the ten, filthy, worthless, dangerous lepers even get to the priests, they are made clean again. They are not *just* healed of a disease; they are given a *new lease on life*. All ten lepers are fully restored from their isolation. All ten lepers are completely redeemed from lifelong poverty. All ten lepers have a fresh start to get on with their lives.

Last Sunday we had a doctor in our congregation who *specializes* in entering villages from the filthy side first. He practices medicine that some people would describe as hopeless. He is passionate—*just like Jesus*—about offering healing to poor people who are mostly written off as worthless outcasts.

In the winter of 2019 it was still hot-as-blazes along the central plateau in Haiti. I followed Dr. Harry Morse there with about twelve others on a medical mission team from the Diocese of Upper S.C. I know it sounds like a joke—*me on a medical team*?!

Well, I got the easy part. I got to preach in a packed, joyful, Episcopal Church in the Village of Cange. All I had to do was preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that could be spontaneously translated into Haitian Creole. It’s one of my favorite sermons! And that has nothing to do with what I said; and *everything to do* with the grace and joy of the congregation who received it.

Let’s be clear. I did not bring Jesus to the Church in that village. He was *already there*!

Remember, Jesus travels *through* the regions we might rather avoid. He never goes around! Jesus does not bypass people in need. He either heals them or he suffers *with them*, because the *essence* of our Lord is compassion, (suffering with)—compassion for the whole human family. “I didn’t come to judge the world,” Jesus says. “I came to *save it!*” (John 12:47)

So, imagine *yourself* getting an unexpected, incredible new lease on life. Maybe you recover from an illness that has pinned you down for a long time. Maybe you get out from under an abusive relationship. Perhaps somebody, somewhere, sees something in you that others have missed; and they are now opening doors for you that you once thought impossible.

What do you do *next*? Do you shout for joy? Do you post it on social media? Do you pick up the phone and share the good news with family or friends? Do you treat yourself to a nice dinner or a night on the town or a shopping spree? These are all *normal* sorts of things that *most people* might do. To be precise, these are the kinds of things that 9 out of 10 people might do.

What about the *one*...the one who turns back...who goes back...in order to do *just one thing*...to kneel down, to humble oneself, and to say, “*Thank you*. Thank you, Lord. I *know* I didn’t deserve that.”

Grace...is getting something you don’t deserve. Worship...is how you say, “*Thank you*.”

We get to kneel down *every week*, humble ourselves, and say, “Thank you, Lord.” *And* we get to offer a little sacrifice of our thanksgiving as we make good on our vows to the Most High God.

Maybe it’s a sacrifice of your money—your power in this world. Maybe it also includes a sacrificial gift of your time and talent...for the glory of God and for the love of our neighbors. As your priest, I will call us together for worship—not only with our *lips* but *also* in our lives, giving up ourselves to God’s service, day in and day out.

I was awakened early on the Monday after the glorious Sunday morning worship in Cange. The roosters told me it was time to get moving. As I tied the laces on my boots and headed out the door, the women of the village had *already gathered* in the open-air Church to practice singing God’s praises for the *next* Sunday morning.

Who *does that*? Who in the world could be *that thankful*? You might just think things are going *great* for the people of Haiti...if you didn’t know any better.

We hiked further uphill to the Village of Belle Air. I had the finest socks and shoes money can buy, the best mosquito repellent, the shade of a wide-brimmed hat, two bottles of fresh, cool water, and yummy snacks. And I—the *foreigner*—was greeted by every single impoverished person on the trail with the same word—*Bonjour*...which literally translates: ‘good day.’

*Was it a good day for them?* If I carried the burdens they carried, would I say, “Good day!” to the foreigners I meet along my path?

This morning we meet another foreigner in our lessons—Naaman, the Commander of the Syrian army. Most of us are not too worried about the afflictions of Syrian soldiers, are we? In this way, we are *very different* from God. God cares about God’s creation. God cares about *all* of God’s human family—the neighbors *we like* and the ones *we don’t*.

You know Jesus *retold this story* about Naaman during his very first sermon in Nazareth. Jesus made his hometown congregation *so mad*, they tried to kill him that day. (Luke 4) We don’t want to hear about God’s mercy for *foreigners*...for people who are different from us...people we consider to be our adversaries.

But Jesus just keeps on pushing us to see other people the way that *he sees them*...compassionately!

“But Lord, *those people*—they don’t believe *like we believe*.”

Jesus looks around and asks, “Were not *ten lepers* made clean? None of (our people) returned to praise God *except* for this foreigner.”

“Lord,” we want to say, “you *know* those people don’t have faith like we do.”

And then Jesus lets us all know what he *really thinks* when he says...*to the foreigner*, “Get up and go on your way; (because)...*your faith*...has made you well.”

Dr. Morse set his traditional physician's leather bag on a small table, and took a seat on a homemade chair that wobbled back and forth in the dust. He handed me an automatic blood pressure monitor and sent me over to the shade of the village's only tree. There was already a long line of people—"where did they all come from?"

My job was to put the blood pressure cuff on the right arm of every person, and to smile into the beautiful face of each beloved child of God, to tap their forearm, and speak in Creole, "cool, cool...cool, cool." Translation: "Relax your arm, it's okay." If their blood pressure was dangerously high, I sent them straight to the front of the line to see our doctors.

Our medical mission is not a 'here today, gone tomorrow' kind of proposition. It is built upon the 'Partners in Health' model designed by Dr. Paul Farmer. These patients not only receive hypertension medicine...they also receive support from a fellow villager who is trained to keep them on track with their medications when the mission teams are *not there*.

This is a working miracle that saves lives and spares families from economic catastrophe due to preventable strokes and heart attacks. We have watched children of these villages grow up into doctors, nurses, and partners in health, performing the compassionate, healing ministry of Jesus for their neighbors.

In 2019 Dr. Morse invited me to see and serve Christ in Haiti, but it was the villagers of the Central Plateau who showed me how to see a goodness in *every day*.

The goodness of a day has *nothing to do* with my estimation of its blessings or hardships. Neither is it contingent upon my resources or my poverty. Every day is good because it is a gift from God, *Bon jour*.

And from sun up on Monday morning to sundown on Sunday night, we get to speak and sing and show and *share* our thanksgiving and praise.

Dear people, the *heart* of the Christian faith is thanks-giving to God. And what Jesus said to the Samaritan also applies *to us*.

It is your *faith* that will make you well.

Amen.