

October 8, 2023- 19th Sunday after Pentecost (observing Thanksgiving Day)

Introduction to Theme of the Day: One Halloween we had a very young trick or treater come to our door. The little needed some prompting from mom about how things are done—“What do you say?”. We expected him to say “trick or treat”. He said thank you. Good on mom and dad for teaching politeness and gratitude. Our thank you’s come from an ancient tradition reflected in the psalms—Praise to God for all the Good God does and is. Thanksgiving Weekend is a perfect time to re-connect to a tradition of giving thanks to God for God’s enduring goodness to us.

Luke 17:11-19

11On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. 15Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Trick question: “where are the other nine”? For ten people their skin disease brought medical problems and for safety’s sake meant they were isolated from their own people. Healing relieved symptoms and complications and paved the way back home to loved ones and community. Go show yourself to the priest and become reintegrated into community. That’s where nine people went.

The tenth person had no priest to go to. Maybe he didn't have much in the way of family either.

Now we are plunged into the very core of what Jesus is all about. Everyone is healed. Priest or no priest people find their way home.

Jesus intentionally crosses borders into a place that's neither here nor there. As the writer and activist Gloria Anzaldua wrote some thirty five years ago, people who live in border towns like those along the Mexico US border live in limbo. The borders are designed to mark us and them; safe and unsafe. That region between Samaria and Galilee is a border zone; a place where people with contagious diseases who used to be among "us" have become a forgotten "them".

Something of the spirituality of the Samaritan is reflected in his loud praises of God and his prostrating himself in front of Jesus. Maybe he recognizes Jesus as the embodiment of God. He experiences God willingly going where others don't, to the margins and borderlands. In complicated and broken relationships and in people's struggle and isolation: Jesus goes there. And he brings love and healing with him.

We know something of borderlands and isolation; we've experienced some of it ourselves as Covid waxes, wanes and threatens to return. We anticipate wearing masks again, getting the vaccines, and probably having to keep our distance for a while. Can joy be found there? Maybe. As Brother David Steindl-Rast says, joy is a sort of happiness that doesn't depend on what happens. He would say that a spirituality of gratitude is a fundamental trust in life, and in God's goodness—even when we languish on the margins and in the borderlands...when we think we have to go it alone in our suffering.

We'll worship as best we can...at the core of the word "worship" and at its essential, we praise God's worthiness-and trust worthiness because God is God and there is no borderland or margin where God's un-ending love does not go.