

October 9, 2022 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 2 Timothy 2:8-15 Luke 17:11-19

“Checking In”

1. They lived in an in-between space.
 - a. Not here, not there
 - i. Rejected by those around them. Rejected by where they came from.
 - ii. They lived almost in the shadows. Not seen. Maybe not noticed, unless it was to shoo them away.
 - iii. They found companionship only with each other, but one wonders if that would only last until a better offer came along.
 - b. That could be the description of so many people, so many groups of people
 - i. I have in mind, of course, the ten men sick with leprosy. We’ll come back to them
 - ii. In a painful way, those could also be people living in poverty or with homelessness
 - iii. In a tragic way, those could also be those who became sick with HIV/AIDS when no one understood the disease
 - iv. Even in a much less dramatic way those could also be first year college students.
 - v. And it could be so many more
2. There are groups of folks who live in an in-between space,
 - a. and because they’re invisible, or seen only as a caricature, or derided and seen as less than human, they live a life that feels utterly alien to what they once knew,
 - i. when they were at the top of their game,
 - ii. when they had a job and a house,
 - iii. before they contracted HIV,
 - iv. when they had not gotten sick with leprosy yet.
 - b. When we encounter the ten in the biblical story, they’re in that uncomfortable, lifeless, in-between space.
 - c. And I’m trying to watch my language.
 - i. Not because I’ll curse, but because I don’t want to speak of the lepers, or the poor, or the infected.
 - ii. Those are conditions that may happen to someone, but they are not the identity of the people.
 - iii. They are people with leprosy, or people living in poverty, or people infected by a virus.
3. When Jesus saw these ten coming towards him, he saw ten people.
 - a. Maybe the disciples saw ten lepers.

- i. We know their hometowns saw ten threats, or ten sub-humans.
 - ii. Which is why they lived where no one else lived. In the desert, far from any settlement, between two groups of people (the Jews, the Samaritans).
- b. When Jesus saw these ten men, he already had compassion for them, because he SAW them, not avoided them, he walked toward them not sidestepped them.
 - i. And he stopped long enough to listen to them.
 - ii. They called him by name. They asked for mercy.
 - iii. Would that mean give us some food? Some money? Does that mean heal us?
 - iv. It's a prayer, really. Lord have mercy!
- c. As Jesus sees them, he sees them fully.
 - i. Jesus knows these are folks from everywhere, and now are here, nowhere.
 - ii. There were Jews and Samaritans in the bunch, and who knows what else.
- d. The ten saw him and knew him.
 - i. I'm not clear on how it is that they knew WHO he was or WHAT he could do for them.
 - ii. Maybe they had a loved one who would bring them food, wrapped up in some cloth, laying it on a rock near their encampment, and yelling at each other from a distance safe enough to stay clear of the contagious condition, maybe the loved one told them that a teacher from nearby Galilee had been healing people all over. Maybe that teacher could offer them healing.
- e. So this wasn't a planned meeting, or a scheduled appointment.
 - i. This was a chance meeting. And the ten wanted to make the most of it.
 - ii. Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!
- f. And he does, simply telling them to go to the priest.
 - i. That is what one did (Lev. 13), for it was the priest who had declared them unclean, and only the priest could give them the label they need to rejoin society: You are clean!
 - ii. When they followed his command, they saw they were healed.
 - iii. Healing wasn't enough, though.
 - iv. They had to go to the priest to have it properly attested to make the right offering to God for purification, and THEN they would be reunited with their family.
- g. And as the story goes, ten were healed, but only one came back to Jesus to say thanks.
 - i. Disobeying the direct order, incidentally, but he came back and fell at the feet of Jesus unable to contain his excitement and gratitude.
 - ii. Having the Samaritan be the example here is not accidental.

- iii. The Jews and Samaritans did not see eye to eye.
 - iv. If you remember the story of the good Samaritan, this can be the story of the thankful Samaritan, and both mean to say to the original audience: you can't look down upon them, nor can you see them as enemies, but now they are an example of faithfulness to you.
 - v. Ouch. Is that like telling a person of the one political party that they need to learn from the example set by a person from the opposing party? What? See them as human?
- 4. This story and the passage from Jeremiah make us think about how and when we stop what we're doing to give God thanks.
 - a. In Jeremiah, the people were in exile, far from home.
 - i. They had lost a war and their punishment was to be moved hundreds of miles to Babylon. Jeremiah had told them this had been God's judgment for them turning away from God.
 - ii. And the message could have been a bit of "I told you so" -- Take your medicine and think on what you've done. But it isn't.
 - b. Instead Jeremiah, writing from the destroyed Jerusalem, sends the exiles a letter saying: live fully where you are.
 - i. Build a house and tend to the land. Get married and have children.
 - ii. Pray for the city where you're exiled, because its prosperity will be your prosperity.
 - iii. And what isn't said but I believe is implied: and give thanks.
 - 1. Give thanks that you get to start over (even in exile).
 - 2. Give thanks that God hasn't forgotten you (even in exile).
 - 3. Give thanks that your family will grow (even in exile).
 - c. And as we saw in the gospel, give thanks when all is going well and you're being reconnected to community.
- 5. I've never been a fan of the idea to force or shame gratitude on others (especially our kids):
 - a. you should be thankful because others have much less than you do.
 - b. Or even among adults: I'm thankful because I know people who have it much worse than me.
 - c. It's not a competition.
 - d. We're thankful, if you'll let me borrow and adapt from the marital vows, we're thankful to God in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in richness and in poverty.
 - e. It isn't our condition in life which dictates our gratitude to God for God's love and mercy.
- 6. The story of the healing of the ten people with leprosy may connect with us in different ways.

- a. For some of us, it opens our eyes to see fully, as Jesus did, people whose temporary condition pushes them to the margins of society
 - i. I meet often with people who are living through homelessness, for example.
 - ii. Invariably, they open my eyes to the harshness of that condition, and the continuing victimization and suspicion they face every day.
 - iii. But they also open my eyes to the compassion and community they share: how they help one another, how they look after one another.
 - iv. Next time you see Ernie with his big cart full of stuff, just know this: He collects that stuff not to hoard it, but to give it to others living through homelessness. I just met a young man whose shoes had been stolen, and he told me he ran into Ernie, who just happened to have a pair of shoes in his cart to fit him.
 - b. And for some of us, we will finally feel seen by Jesus, fully
 - i. Maybe because we had been pushed to the sidelines as a person who came out of the closet as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, non-binary.
 - ii. Maybe because generational poverty has been a cycle difficult to break for us
 - iii. But this story makes plain that Jesus sees us, and not only wants to be with us, but wants us to be reconnected fully to the community
 - iv. No more “in-between” space, but once more (or for the first time) fully a member of community.
7. Doing the work of God’s justice, that is, seeking to follow how Jesus disrupted injustice around him, will challenge us to meet one another in those in-between places, in the discomfort of lingering bias, in the anguish of problems that seem too large to solve.
- a. I want to challenge us to stay in that tension, in that discomfort
 - b. I want to challenge us to listen, to see each other fully, not to try to fix but to be in solidarity
 - i. Notice which conditions are transitory
 - ii. Notice when identity runs deep
 - iii. Notice how God is present with us through it all
 - iv. Notice the opportunities to disrupt injustice
 - v. Notice the opportunities to create community
 - vi. And in the process, in the midst of the joy or the sorrow, the sickness or the pain, the richness or the poverty, notice the moments when we feel fully seen by God and give God thanks.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-28-3/commentary-on-luke-1711-19-5>

Reflection questions

1. Share a story when you felt truly seen (when someone “got who you are”).
2. There are several lessons in the story about the ten people being healed (Luke 17:11-19). Which one speaks most to you and why?
3. How can the church disrupt or dismantle ways society shuns people?