

Sermon Luke 17: 11-19 October 9, 2016
October Sermon Series "Learn from the Master"

Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When Jesus saw them, He said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him – and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then Jesus said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

October's Verse for the Soul: Matthew 11:28-30

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

Yesterday I was in Hayfork, where our daughter lives, in the mountains near the Trinity River. It's fall in Hayfork; there's frost in the mornings, the leaves are turning colors, and I picked up the nicest-looking acorns from all the acorns that littered the deck. I love acorns, those little heralds of the changing of the seasons... that fall is coming. Acorns - the nuts of oak trees, each held in a protective little cup - are a symbol that life changes, and that in the changes we are somehow held from smashing apart when we hit the deck. Change - especially loss - unsettles us, and we sometimes feel less than who we were... not quite as good maybe, not quite as confident... we present not quite as good a face as we'd like.

Margie Alley was one of my best friends at Wesley United Methodist Church where Ralph and I attended when our children were young. Margie was about 40 years older than I was, and she faced change and aging with love and humor. She once told me the hardest part of getting old for her was that there were no "elders" for her to go to for advice. Change happened sometimes too quickly for her, and there weren't parents or older siblings to go to remember with her how things had been. I didn't have any wisdom at the time (O thank You God that somehow I knew this!) to offer Margie, but I could hold her hand (to remind her that God held Margie in God's hand.) I know I am the queen of the metaphor... always looking for a lesson, a message, something that tells me of how God is present and at work in the world, and in our lives. I see the acorn as a living metaphor of change... of falling to the ground and hitting the deck and yet held together, held in God's hand.

Often when I am with people who've fallen off the "tree" onto the hard ground of old age, or illness, or fear, or grief... I try to search with them for where God is... how God is present. And we wind our way around the path of change and we find our way back... we remember... that God loves us, that God is with us. And somehow we find our way back to thankfulness because... God holds us.

Jesus was called Emmanuel, which means God-with-us, and He lived our life, and suffered our miseries, and experienced change like we do, and He redeemed the change of crucifixion and defeat into resurrection and eternal life. God is with us, God holds onto us, and when change alters us and unsettles us - when we fall from the tree and hit the deck - God keeps us intact. God offers us a new way of being. I haven't ever fallen out of a tree but I did fall outside a couple of years ago and it stunned me. For a moment I lay on the cement, not knowing anything, not sure of anything. When I did remember that I'd fallen and it really hurt I was sorry those few moments of forgetfulness were over.

The word "remember" comes from the Latin word "memor" which means "mindful." When we remember that we are held by God... whatever the change... we can be thankful... even when we fall from the tree and hit the deck. We might be stunned, forgetful, beside ourselves because of change, but God holds us... reminding us of God's love and presence, then and there. When we are mindful of God's love and care in the moment, we have the opportunity to practice thankfulness, to say "O thank You, God." I said that my friend Margie Alley faced change with love and humor. She knew that in all the changes of aging God held her, and knew her, and she responded to God with thankfulness. Margie practiced her faith through thankfulness.

Luke tells us that there were ten men who were lepers and Samaritans (more modern translations have changed leprosy to "skin conditions" but that sounds like the ten men had pimples.) There were ten lepers who saw Jesus and cried out to Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Word must have spread even to those outcasts, of the traveling Rabbi who touched and healed the sick as a sign of God's Kingdom at hand. Leprosy was thought to be radically contagious, and was greatly feared, and was seen not just as a medical condition but as also spiritual condition (the person was spiritually unclean, unfit to be part of the worshiping community, isolated, banished, truly an "untouchable".) Jesus said to the ten men, "Go show yourselves to the priests" (not the doctor) because skin conditions and illness were believed to be a sign of sin and separation from all that was holy... separation from God. In Luke's gospel Jesus touches all kinds of people (which would have made Jesus spiritually unclean as well) to show that God isn't separate from us broken, sick, sinful humans, but that God loves us, and holds us.

On the way to the priests the men were "made clean" and once of them, seeing that he was healed, turned around... he made his way back to Jesus, and threw himself at Jesus' feet, praising God. This man was a Samaritan, a despised race by the Jews, and so doubly-outcast. And Jesus marveled at him, that of all the ten men who were healed, one - a heathen by Jewish standards - exercised his faith. He exercised his faith by expressing thankfulness. Jesus saw his faith and trust in God and his thankfulness, and told him, "Your faith has made you well." Clearly, being well was more than being cured of disease, and more than experiencing physical healing. Being well is being mindful and thankful for God's amazing love and care.

For many of us thankfulness doesn't come naturally or easily. Discouragement and low expectations and cynicism are easier and safer responses to change... whether it's unexpected healing or falling from a tree and hitting the deck. Luke tells us that part of our well-being is thankfulness... praising God that at all times and in all circumstances we are known... we are loved... we are held by God.

This chapter of Luke's gospel begins with Jesus talking about the cost of discipleship... of being His follower... that includes serving and forgiving the sins. In this story of Jesus and the ten lepers, praising God is also one of the demands of discipleship. Being thankful acknowledges God's presence and God's care, and our dependence on God. The most basic response of faith is "Thank You. Thank You, God." Meister Eckhart, a 13th century German theologian, philosopher, and mystic, said, "If the only prayer you ever say is 'thank You' it will be enough."

This month we have a verse to learn, to say over and over until it becomes a part of us. You'll find it on page 4 of the bulletin, about half way down the page. Jesus said these words, and they are meant for us as we walk with Him, and learn from Him, as serve, as we forgive, and as we exercise our faith by being thankful.

Let's read it together, starting with the words, "Jesus said." [Jesus said] "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Thank You. Thank You, God! Amen.