

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church

March 22, 2020

ISOLATED AND ALONE

LUKE 17:11-19

Now, I know this coronavirus is a serious problem but there actually may be some benefits that come from it. One of the hardest things to deal with for me and those other avid sports fans is no sports on tv...no basketball, no baseball...seasons halted, cancelled, or postponed. It's depressing. Of course, that too could have some benefits. I heard about one guy who found a young lady sitting on his couch yesterday. Apparently, she's his wife. He says, she seems nice.

I've heard of people who actually found buried treasures when they finally had time to clean their homes.

I really didn't think I had to worry too much about the effects of coronavirus. After all, it is most devastating to the elderly. You don't really consider me elderly, do you? I don't but apparently my kids do because they have been harassing me about the need to stay home. One daughter even accused me of being suicidal because I went to the store. I informed her I was not suicidal. I was being careful and I wasn't afraid. I hate getting advice from my kids...even if they have a point.

I'm only kidding, I know this is not a laughing matter but I've read that laughter is not only good for the soul but it also boosts your immune system. I have been watching reruns of the Big Bang Theory and Mash because no matter how many times I have seen them, they make me laugh. I don't know what makes you laugh but tune in and enjoy. Even better, find something spiritually uplifting, a good movie or listen to good Christian music, whether your preference is the old hymns, or the latest Christian praise music...find something that inspires and lifts your spirits. Just don't watch too much news...fake or otherwise, it's depressing.

It is difficult to stay home even for those of us who live alone and aren't wild and crazy party people. We never realized how confining it could be to suddenly be told you **must** stay home. Part of it is that we don't like being told what to do. At least, I don't like being told what to do. We are used to going to restaurants and grocery stores and coming to church to worship and having coffee and donuts with our friends. We could handle a week or two of this kind of isolation but even for introverts like me, this idea of having an extended period of isolation is difficult to imagine.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be isolated away from your family, your friends, your neighbors, your church for the rest of your life. This is the kind of isolation the men in our scripture lesson for this morning were experiencing. Hear this story from the Gospel of Luke.

READ: LUKE:17:11-19

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. At the border between Samaria and Judea, he encounters ten men who were living with a terrible disease that was very contagious. When people got near to them, they had to shout “unclean”, “unclean” to prevent anyone coming close. Leprosy was an infectious disease that caused sores and nerve damage. Victims lost fingers and arms and legs and eventually died from the disease. People were so **fearful** of contracting the disease that as soon as someone was believed to have it, they were cast out of the home, out of the community.

We are dealing with our own infectious disease and **the fear** it has generated. People who have been exposed are being asked to self-quarantine in order to prevent the spread of the disease.

In our scripture these ten men have been living under a quarantine for quite some time. They are so lonely that they have banded together. Normally Jews and Samaritans would not live together but these men needed to be with others....others who were suffering just as they were suffering. It didn't matter that normally they would have been enemies. They were desperate for friends, for contact.

Then, suddenly, there was a flicker of hope. They no doubt had heard about this man, Jesus, and that he had the power to heal. They respectfully kept their distance but shouted out to him and asked him to have mercy on them. When Jesus saw them, he told them to go and show themselves to the priest.

Now, this was an act of faith on their part, because they had not yet been healed. The scripture says, “as they went” they were healed. It was their faith and their obedience that healed them.

Can you imagine **the joy**. Can you imagine **the shock**. Can you imagine **the gratitude**...wait a minute. Nine did not even bother to say “thank you.” There was only one who turned back to praise God and to bow at Jesus feet...to express his gratitude. That one, the only one, was the Samaritan.

You would have thought they all would have joined their voices in a “hallelujah chorus”. They would have lifted Jesus on their shoulders and carried him to Jerusalem but they did not.

I don't want to judge them too harshly, after all, suddenly they were no longer in quarantine. Once the priest saw that they were clean, they could return to their families and to their jobs and to their friends and neighbors. They couldn't wait to get back to normal life.

I think we can all relate. We are anxious for life to return to normal.

But, remember, there was one who returned to say thanks and to worship Jesus. Do you think Jesus was disappointed that the other nine did not return?

I wonder how disappointing it must be when we constantly **ask and ask and ask** but rarely stop to really give thanks. The scriptures tell us that Jesus knows our needs even before we ask.

As part of my devotional time each morning, I journal. I reflect on the devotional and scripture I have read. It always amazes me how whatever I have read applies to my own life. Once I have finished my reflections, I list the things from the day before for which I am thankful. Sometimes it's pretty routine...time with family, home, church but sometimes it is more specific...an answer to prayer. A meaningful conversation. A beautiful day. A good report from the doctor. I list my prayers of thanksgiving before I list my prayers of concern. That list can be quite extensive as I think about the needs of my family and friends, and others who have asked me to pray for them. Then I list my prayers of confession. I think back over the previous day and recall when I was impatient, demanding, controlling...that list can get pretty long as well.

I start my day...with gratitude, with concern for others, and with a reminder that I am a sinful human being and in need of forgiveness.

When the Samaritan returned to give praise and gratitude to Jesus, he got even more than healing, he had his sins forgiven. The other nine had been physically healed but the Samaritan had been spiritually healed as well. He could now present himself to the priest and be declared clean. He could also return to his family and his community...a healed and I imagine a completely changed man. He had been given new life.

We don't know how long we will continue to feel alone and isolated, but we do know that this too will pass. The coronavirus will run its course and cures will be found and vaccines developed. Unfortunately, it may be more a matter of weeks rather than days.

How we long to get back to our normal routines. How we long to be back in our sanctuary for worship and to be with our friends from church praising God for all that he has done and is doing for us.

Let's don't forget to thank God for the progress that is being made. Let's give thanks for modern technology that enables us to stay connected. Let's give thanks for our Care team that has been seeing to the needs of those who are vulnerable and isolated. Let's give thanks for the creative people on this staff, who have made it possible for us to continue to worship as Palm Harbor United Methodist. Let's give thanks for all who have contributed and continue to contribute their tithes, gifts and offerings, to enable us to continue our ministries.

Let's not forget to thank God for Jesus and the gift of salvation. Let's thank him for the gift of the Holy Spirit that is with us now and always so that we are never really alone.

Let's even thank him for this time of isolation that gives us time to meditate, to pray, to read the scriptures, to do many of the things that we have for so long said we didn't have time to do. This too is a gift from God.