

Sermon, Proper 23C, October 13, 2019, Jane A. Beebe

“Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.” (Psalm 66:8-9)

As I prayed the readings for this week, I began to hear a resonance between the portion of Psalm 66 we just recited and the story of the healing of the ten lepers in the Gospel. As you all know by now, I love walking outdoors. It is not surprising that I respond to images in Scripture involving pathways, tracks, and roads—or their lack thereof—and how God is able to make a way for us even in places that look like wilderness.

Jesus is continuing his journey to Jerusalem—something we should keep in mind as we hear this story of healing. As Jesus gets closer, his care for his disciples learning intensifies. He has much left to teach them. Jesus’ decision to travel through the region of Galilee and Samaria is, in itself, a lesson. Ordinarily Samaria would be avoided. The Samaritans were a people so similar to the Jews: believing in the one God, studying the Torah, and hoping for the coming of the Messiah. Their focus of worship was the mountains of the north, not the temple in Jerusalem. In John, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, ““Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship

him...” (John 4:21-23) This woman becomes an apostle, expanding Jesus’ ministry to Samaria. Jesus finds a way where there seemingly was no way.

Next we hear that Jesus enters a village where ten lepers approach him, yet keeping their distance. Those suffering from leprosy were not completely separated from society, but were considered unclean in a ritual sense. They call out to Jesus, asking for mercy. Jesus sees them. It is not clear what happens in that moment as the lepers are received into Jesus’ loving gaze. Jesus simply says, “Go and show yourselves to the priest.” (Luke 17:14) And then we hear an extraordinary thing: “...As they went, they were made clean.” As they went. As much as we would like an instantaneous result, sometimes healing comes as we follow the path right in front of us, and bit by bit.

All ten were healed. Once they have been declared by the priest to be clean, they may be restored to normal lives. Yet one chooses to turn back. He praises God, prostrates himself before Jesus, and offers thanks. I can understand the other nine. What has happened to them is momentous: their lives will not be the same. Perhaps it is confusing and overwhelming. I imagine them being somewhat stupefied. Adjusting to a new way of life will take some doing. The one who turns back, the Samaritan, marginalized on two counts, seeks one thing more. The last phrase we hear today is: “Your faith has made you well.” It can also be translated

as: “Your faith has saved you,” or “Your faith has made you whole.” This man’s healing is body, mind, *and* spirit.

Finally Jesus tells him, “Get up and go on your way.” What we have here is a resurrection story. This man’s dignity has been restored; he has attained salvation. He no longer has to keep to the sidelines. He has a new path, opened for him by Jesus, on which to travel. Given his circumstances, to have a path at all is a marvelous thing. Since we just had a celebration of St. Francis last week with the animal blessing, I recalled a story about him that is probably apocryphal, but still wonderful. It was said that he would call new brothers simply by beginning to run as fast as he could through the fields. Any inspired to run after him would be welcomed into the community!

As verse 12 of the Psalm says, “...We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.” There is a special feeling of joy at encountering this “spacious place.” You may have had the experience of slogging through an unfamiliar trail or highway only to reach a place where the landscape opens out, offering a spectacular view. Even if one has not reached the sought-for destination, this is a place to pause, to take a breath, to offer a prayer of thanks. Gratitude in this instance flows out naturally, even joyfully.

As a child I spent several summers at a camp in the mountains of North Carolina, just north of Asheville. These mountains do not have the same grandeur

as the Rockies perhaps, yet they are among the highest mountains east of the Mississippi. The final week of camp usually involved a long hike over the course of three or four days. The last evening of one such hike we ended up on a bald, or a mountain meadow. I remember all of us kids got a second wind after hiking all day and decided to play “kick the can” on the hills. We hid behind the rocks on the tops of the hills and then ran down as fast as we could to kick the can before getting tagged. I still remember the rush of joy as we ran downhill in that beautiful, open space. It was a very *Sound of Music* moment!

“Happy Wanderer”

*I love to go a-wandering along the mountain track
And as I go I love to sing, my knapsack on my back.*

*Valderi, valdera, valderi, valdera-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha
Valderi, valdera, my knapsack on my back*

*I love to wander by the stream that dances in the sun
So joyously it calls to me "Come join my happy song".*

*I wave my hat to all I meet and they wave back to me
And blackbirds call so loud and sweet from every greenwood tree.*

*High overhead the skylark wing, they never rest at home
But just like me they love to sing as o'er the world we roam.*

*O may I go a-wandering until the day I die
And may I always laugh and sing beneath God's clear blue sky.*

Concluding Prayer & Blessing: From Steven Charleston's *Cloud Walking*, p. 5.

"All marks of time are an illusion, but even illusions have their place, so I step over this threshold, with a reminder of God's timeless grace. May these days ahead bring you the challenge to be who you are called to be. May they offer you a warm hand of healing when you hurt, strength in every struggle, the sheer joy of new discovery. May you know the peace that passes understanding, the hope that lifts your spirit to new horizons. May you know love. May your talent be tested. And may the paths you follow, the causes you embrace, the truths you tell, bring you closer to the meaning of your tomorrow."

Posted by a wise friend: "Walking is a humble and wonderful practice where contemplation and activity meet, where self and the world dance. Walking weaves my solitary person into our shared neighborhood. Walking takes simple, one-step-at-a-time activity, activity that any child can do, up into a life of exploration and adventure."