

A.M.D.G.  
ad majorem dei gloriam

## **“The Land between Samaria and Galilee”**

A Reflection for the 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Based on ROCI 4485 Reflections on Community Involvement ClassNote: Who is my neighbor?

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### A Prayer before Reading the Scripture:

Prepare our hearts, O God, to accept your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that hearing, we may also obey your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

– Amen

### The First Reading: Psalm 122 – A psalm of ascents. Of David (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

<sup>2</sup>Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together.

<sup>4</sup>To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of The Lord.

<sup>5</sup>For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David.

<sup>6</sup>Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you.

<sup>7</sup>Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.”

<sup>8</sup>For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.”

<sup>9</sup>For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

### The Gospel: St. Luke 17:11-19 (NRSV)

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

For the Word of God in Scripture,  
For the Word of God among us,  
For the Word of God within us,  
Thanks be to God.

Jesus is on the road... he's set his sight towards Jerusalem, and has begun his last journey to that destination. The Apostle Luke chronicles the journey beginning with the words:

“...he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Psalm 122, a pilgrim psalm for the journey to Jerusalem is probably one of the things he's contemplating, especially the words:

<sup>6</sup>Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you.

<sup>7</sup>Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.”

<sup>8</sup>For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.”

<sup>9</sup>For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

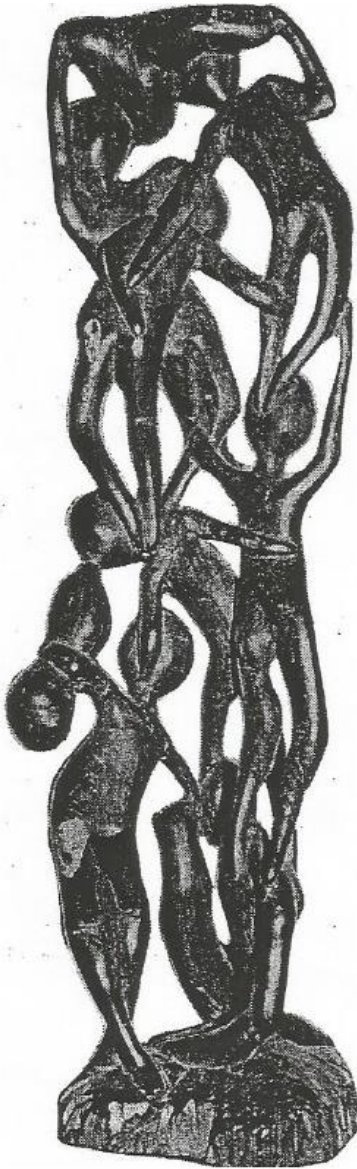
On the way, he passes through the region between Samaria and Galilee, and as he enters a village, he's met by ten lepers who, denied the “...*peace of Jerusalem*...”, stand at a distance, calling upon him for mercy. The easy Sunday morning message is to speak about the Lord's mercy, or the gratefulness of the one leper who returned to give thanks, or the self-centeredness of the other nine who didn't, or that the one who was healed was a double-outcast – a Samaritan and a leper – and the sermon becomes a very familiar story from the ministry of Jesus – mercy, healing, gratitude, and lack thereof.

But maybe the point of this story isn't mercy, healing, gratitude, and lack thereof. Maybe the point of the story is to reflect on where Jesus and his disciples were travelling – through that “*in-between land*.” Does Luke offer this detail as a mere literary device to get Jesus from one place to another? Or is it something more? Are we meeting up with Jesus this morning in this particular place for a reason?

The land between Samaria and Galilee is neither one nor the other. It's a border area, a “*no-man's land*” that by its very existence, is a place where it's impossible to forget that the two had once been one, united as a kingdom under David. It's where Jeroboam, from the northern part of the kingdom, and Rehoboam, the son of Solomon (1 Kings 12), confronted each other causing the political and theological schism that exists to this day. It's a place where the experience of exile and influx of foreigners left its mark forever on the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Today, it's a place of conflict between Palestinian and Israelite. It's a place where one might find oneself unsure of who belonged and who didn't; of where one might be uncertain, un-trusting, and even a little fearful. It's where the accustomed rules might not apply – where one would not fully know one's place. The “*in-between land*” where Jesus is today, while it is a place where we are called to be, in all honesty, it's a place we try to avoid.

So, what remained after subtracting mercy, healing, gratitude, and lack thereof from the scripture was that as we walk with Jesus, we will have to accompany him into this “*in-between land*,” into places in some ways, we would really try to avoid.

This shouldn't have come as a surprise to me, except I'm finding myself more and more in these places whether I want to be or not. I find this so whether my daily life takes me to a school or a construction site, an office building or a hospital, a shopping center or a street corner. I find myself walking a line between what I know and what I wonder about as I encounter this uncertain, often frightening “*in-between-ness*” in the lives of others – or in my own.



*Ujamaa* carving: God created us to be in community, to be in relationship.

I've been thinking a lot, recently, about this awareness that lately I'm more and more in that strange land where Jesus traveled so long ago. I see it at the turn-off to McDonald's on US 52, on the corners at the intersections of Chillicothe Street and Gay Street and US 52. At the university, I hear it from the candid comments of students passing through the hall. I read about it in the media – of how people young and old inhabit nether reaches of our cities and the lonely stretches of the country side. I see the graphic videos posted on the Internet of people in heroin-induced comas close to breathing their last. I've found that I share space with people from that "*in-between land*" in the doctor's office, and in the supermarket checkout line, and that rarely is anything expected of me beyond civility. Does my life no longer have space for the people in the "*in-between land*"?

The "*in-between land*" is not a world I know well. I have been looking at it, but have I really been observing it? I grew up safe and protected and in a world entirely foreign to the anger and despair that I'm seeing. Much of my life I have believed that if one just did the right thing one's efforts would be rewarded – but here are these people who appear to have done all they knew to do only to unspeakably suffer in the "*in-between land*."

But now, I can't avoid this "*in-between land*." I don't much like it. Traveling in the "*in between land*" is where words are hard to come by, and healing seems so awfully elusive – where the rules I've come to count on don't quite seem to apply. But from this story, if I am walking with Jesus, this is from where God is calling me ... to this same place where Jesus traveled when those desperate, hopeful lepers cried out for mercy. They cannot be left alone in this "*in-between land*" of grief and confusion, of anger and despairing hope.

Through the ministry of Jesus, no one is left outside of his circle of care. Thus as Christians, no one should be left outside our circle of care. Jesus make this very clear! But if this circle is as inclusive as Jesus makes it, is it possible to think meaningfully about our responsibility to people in the "*in-between land*" ... isn't there a danger that our already diluted sense of connection and responsibility will be further diminished?

I don't have Jesus' power to cleanse and make whole as is told in this remarkable, familiar story before us now. But I do have the power to step into those in-between places into people's lives where one can no longer deny that a life once whole is now broken, and where the pain of their experience may be simply heartbreaking. Those

“places” where the lepers and the Samaritan in today's Gospel once lived – cut off from all they knew and loved and took for granted – are the places you and I can walk into and maybe, just maybe, become the beginning of cleansing, of healing, of restoration, of justice, shelter, food, and care. And somehow even just that alone sometimes evokes the kind of gratitude we witness in today's lesson.

It seems to me, it's where we're being called more and more – out of our comfort zones. I expect there was a time when fear alone would have kept me from choosing to walk into these in-between places: this land between Samaria and Galilee where the rules don't apply and the words are hard to find and healing is elusive. I'm not entirely certain what has changed except most days I see no other choice. And even so on many days I still find myself surprised to be here bringing gifts of justice, shelter, food, and care. This is what Jesus did when and where he travelled to make his love real. So don't you suppose that's exactly the way and where God's people are called to travel, too? And no matter what happens next, the world is already a better, safer place because of every time we make the effort to go to the “*in-between land*.”

*Kyrie eleison.*

*Christe eleison.*

*Kyrie eleison.*

– Amen.

#### Reference:

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- (2) The Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt, pastor, First Lutheran, DeKalb, IL. “*Between Samaria and Galilee*” Luke 17:11-19, Pentecost 21C, <<http://words.dancingwiththeword.com/2013/10/between-samaria-and-galilee.html>> retrieved October 8, 2016
- (3) The Pastor's Bible Study, Volume Three. *A New Interpreter's Bible Study: The Gospel of Luke*, Robert E. Van Voorst, Luke 17:11-19
- (4) Christine D. Pohl. *The Living Pulpit: Neighbors: Our Circle of Care*.
- (5) This I Believe. Miles Goodwin: *The Connection Between Strangers*. <<http://thisibelieve.org/essay/9365>> retrieved November 17, 2011.