

PENTECOST: SHARING NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 10, 2010

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c
Psalm 111
2 Timothy 2:8-15
Luke 17:11-19

Grace and Gratitude

The Gospel according to Luke tells of a community of pain transformed into a community of hope in the presence of Jesus. Then a breath later, they become a community of healing. Ten lepers ask for mercy, and there it is.

A trusting encounter with Jesus and they were made clean.

When that happened, exactly how it happened (and God only knows), these lepers were changed from sick to well, from broken to whole, from unclean to clean, from separated to connected, from outcasts to “invited back in,” from men who hid behind shrouds to men who paraded their restored bodies right down Main Street. For the first time in ages, no one would be afraid to come near them, to touch them, to hold their hands, to embrace and hug them, to welcome them home.

When God’s people ask for mercy, God’s grace says, Yes! That’s the way it works. That’s the way it worked then; that’s the way it works now. And when God offers us such grace, unholy ones become holy. Maybe Thomas Aquinas overstates it by putting it this way: “Grace renders us like God and a partaker of the divine nature.” If that’s putting it too strongly for you, Aquinas also said, “Grace is nothing else than a beginning of glory in us.”

The ten were connected in their affliction and in their healing. Nine of them received and did not question the joy and happiness that came out of this miraculous event. But “one of them, finding himself cured, turned back with shouts of praise to God” (Luke 17:15 *REB*). Only one. Then in the very next verse Luke adds this shocking twist: “And he was a Samaritan.” Luke’s first readers would likely gasp here. Remember, even if he is cleansed of his leprosy, a Samaritan is still unclean. Healed. Saved. Yet still an outsider to the Jewish religious community ... but *not* to Jesus!

Who are the lepers and outsiders and unholy ones of our day and our neighborhood? Watch what happens when they cry for mercy. Look at how God draws them inside, and welcomes them, and transforms them. Hear how they sing God’s praise with an enthusiasm and joy we have forgotten. Why does God work through *them* to teach us our lessons for living? Maybe to keep

us from thin piety or thick complacency! Maybe just to keep us off guard, lest we think the community is just fine as it is.

This week's Reflection was prepared by The Rev. Jeff Kellam, a retired Presbyterian pastor thoroughly enjoying autumn in Owego, NY.

+ + +

This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Albania – with thanks to God for the Interconfessional Old Testament translation project; and with prayers for the translators and the long term funding of this project; for the staff and families of the Bible Society; for the distribution of the Bible for Orthodox Church children published in 2009; for Albania's young people, and for those leading *Lectio Divina* groups in Catholic churches; **Slovenia** – with thanks for everything that God has done for them in the past year, especially through the Bible marathon; and with prayers for this year's marathon; for further fundraising development; for cooperation with the main Catholic Church, and for the launch of the pilot edition of the translation of Luke's Gospel in Slovene, that it may prove to be useful to the unchurched and to the young people; **Croatia** – with thanks to God that all churches welcomed the Revised Šarić Bible; for enabling them to distribute 30,000 Bibles both in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and for the income generated from this project; and with prayers that the recession will not negatively impact the project; and for the translation into modern Croatian, which is crucial to the future of the Bible Society.

Activity Corner: "Showing Gratitude"

Supplies Needed: Bible, white paper, pens/pencils

Reflect on Luke 17:15-16. The Samaritan who showed gratitude did not only say "Thanks," but he also "through himself to the ground at Jesus' feet" (verse 16). The Gospel writer, Luke, draws our attention to the necessity of showing gratitude when we experience the kindness of others. Think about the many ways in which people have done something extraordinary for you, or even a routine task that makes your day go more smoothly. Maybe you've thought it enough to say, "Thanks," but sometimes the words are not enough. Discuss ways in which we can show gratitude, and list them. Answers might include: sending a greeting card, treating someone to lunch, or writing a detailed email. Encourage everyone to commit to showing gratitude in one of these ways today. Younger children can be instructed to write 'Thank You' letters to their parents/guardians for what they do for them.