

**October 13, 2019**  
**Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
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## **CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP ACCORDING TO LUKE 17:11-19**

Lectionary texts: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-17, Psalm 66:1-12, 2 Timothy 2:8-15, and Luke 17:11-19

It is important to be clear when reading the gospels, especially the first three, Matthew, Mark and Luke that all of the teaching and healing of Jesus is not done randomly, but is always part of Jesus intention to go to Jerusalem, where he says, repeatedly, he will be arrested, betrayed, and killed and rise on the third day.

Christian discipleship always has a direction and a goal, and is never random. Christian discipleship always with moves with intention toward a Jerusalem, where the purpose and meaning of following Jesus is finally shown to us, and where we find we finally lose our self and find new life in Jesus Christ. So, when the text begins that Jesus was "on the way to Jerusalem" there is significance for our own discipleship and as well as the ministry of Jesus. Christian discipleship always has an end point, a direction, and a purpose.

Now the actual location in the text is not named. It is so imprecise that it's almost nowhere, "the region between Samaria and Galilee." Bible notes says, "the intended location is not clear at all." There is nothing between Samaria and Galilee, they are next to each other. Luke may have gotten lazy here, realized that the exact village didn't matter. This raises the question in our following of Christ if it is important to know where we are, or is it enough to know where are going.

On Friday evening my wife, Jan and I, went to Rizzi's an Italian restaurant on Merchants Road in Rochester. I always have trouble with Merchants Road. I never know where it's going. I am waiting for Winton, but its' the other direction. I get very confused, and very happy to finally reach Culver Road, and know again where I am. I am reassured by my wife, 'just keep going she says, you'll get to Culver Road.' This seems to happen to me every time on Merchants Road, off Atlantic Avenue on the east side of Rochester, sort of like "between Galilee and Samaria".

Sometimes in Christian discipleship we don't know where we are. What was familiar suddenly isn't and we wait with some anxiety for Culver Avenue, hoping that maybe it will be Winton, which unfortunately was the other way.

We need to remember that the Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, nothing deterred him. He may have been lost, it doesn't say, but it didn't bother him, he knew where he was headed.

Anyway.... So somewhere Jesus enters a village and is approached by ten lepers. You remember from Sunday School that lepers were quarantined because their disease was so contagious, which is why they keep their distance. Those in dramatic straights are always drawn to Jesus, those others want to stay away from. This is important for us to remember in our following of the Lord, those we may want to avoid may be drawn to us.

I had the privilege of serving as Protestant Chaplain at the Rochester Psychiatric Hospital for 17 years and through the years had a growing circle of folks who now live back in the community, often without means, and often alone. Now and then, I meet them. We recognize each other, and smile, some will say 'hi, Reverend'. One time on the way to an RPO concert one of my hospital friends saw me just outside the theatre. His eyes brightened. I smiled and tried to walk by. He wanted some cash. I did the proper thing and said no. Later my Jan said, "I wished you had given him \$5." I am so pleased to see my old friends on the streets. Their smiles jar me. They are supposed to be street folks we pass by. But they are my friends and I am so pleased to see them and they me. In Christian discipleship, those we may want to avoid are drawn to us and we to them.

So the lepers keep their distance but shout out, "Jesus, master have mercy on us." Others in the biblical text shout out to Jesus. The blind beggar in Jericho shouts, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." A woman in a crowd touches Jesus and he turns and asks, 'who touched me,' This shout, when we hear it, is the call the of Christ to follow. Once you have heard this, and it sticks, it is very difficult to ignore and go back to normal living.

Jan and I moved to Allen's Creek Valley about a year ago. Living is very, very normal here. I love it most of the time. It is so quiet at night. Everyone is super friendly, but now and then I get uneasy, because I don't think normal living is possible. Even in retirement we don't cease hearing, "Jesus, master, have mercy on us," without doing something.

So Jesus doesn't waste time, doesn't question, just says, 'go and show yourselves to the priests.' And what happens? 'As they went, they were made clean.' The ten lepers don't say, "make us clean first, Jesus, then we will go to the priests." No, they just went, and as they went they were made clean. The lepers took a step toward the priest, on their own, before the healing began. To be healed in Christ, do we have to take a step toward wholeness? Or do we stay passive and wait for evidence that makes us hopeful? The lepers' faith was based only on the words of Jesus.

Every morning in the hospital patients were asked to do 'activities of daily living.' ADL's. They were the simple things like getting out of bed, washing your face, brushing your teeth, combing your hair. And you were supposed to get them done before breakfast. You could always tell who at the breakfast table had managed and who had not. Psychiatric treatment begins when the patient begins to make an effort. It's an odd phrase in the text, 'and on their way they were made clean.' Can you imagine, having lived in a leper colony for your life, and suddenly taking a step away only because the Lord tells you to.

In Christian discipleship wholeness and healing requires us to start walking in that direction. And if we seek to help others, or invite others to faith, we must be clear, that you cannot remain passive, but must begin to walk, even when it is very, very difficult.

All ten lepers are healed. One returns, however, and falls at the feet of Jesus and thanks him. I have a memory as a kid sitting in a church pew, and thinking about this story as it was told. This is a story that catches all ages, or that small part of us that wants to be thankful.

To be thankful is the new life Christ begins in us. And we must nurture and guard this change in our heart. For it is tested, and weakens. Jeremiah says to the exiled in Babylon, 'pray for the city, as your new home, take care of yourself.' Paul says, "Timothy encourage the people, not to wrangle>" Both lectionary texts the lectionary compiler thought important to hear along side this gospel text. We must guard the change in our hearts, so that being thankful doesn't weaken and be lost, because it will and it does.

The text has some implications for Christian discipleship or how we find and follow the Lord. And here is some application: 1) Don't worry, if you feel you are lost on Merchants Road. You probably are not. It's more important to know where you are headed, than where you are. 2) Be sure to get up in the morning and do your ADL's before breakfast, even if it is very difficult. We need to take a step toward new life in Christ, and not remain passive. 3) Don't believe that life can ever return to normal, once you have heard the call of Christ in those we probably hope to avoid. Karl Barth said your life is lie if you try to go back to normal. 4) And guard your heart, for being thankful is fragile plant.

This is only one way of thinking about this text. I think it works. There are other ways. Especially, the way Jesus seems to always pick a fight with his people. Who was the leper who returned and was thankful? The foreigner. Who was the one who finally helped the one beaten on the road? The Samaritan, another foreigner. And what was the first thing Jesus said to folks in his home town synagogue when he first begins? The faith of the Gentle widow was greater than the faith of any in Israel. Why pick a fight? For another time. Let's stay today with some thoughts on discipleship.