

Out on the Edge

Luke 17: 11-19

What's Going on This Week

- I had thought about a number of ways I could approach this Gospel story about the 10 Lepers: being surprised by God, or what we can learn from miracles, or a 12-Step Program to have a Spirit of Thankfulness.
- However, there have been a number of things (5, actually) swirling around this week that engaged me with today's Gospel reading
 - The 1st: It's time again for the Mutual Ministry Review at CEC:
 - when everyone (Clergy, Bishop's Committee, Congregation) assesses how well we are fulfilling their responsibilities to each other and the ministries we share,
 - and where we set goals for the work CEC for the coming year
 - The 2nd: Article appeared in the NYT about how the Diocese of Brooklyn called in a Franciscan priest and deacon to save the Holy Family Slovak Church, a church that was on the brink of closing.
 - The church was a dead zone in a neighborhood of Millennials
 - One of the first things the friars did was to change the name of the church to San Damiano Mission.
 - Their story in the NYT had a picture with friars behind the bar at the entrance to the mission, taking cash and pouring Coors and Lime-A-Ritas for 200 millennials attending a pop concert at the church
 - And not only were they content to welcome millennials to church, they were also seen shopping in the neighborhood, in their Franciscan robes, as part of their effort to reach out to the community
 - Which also include partnering with a Lutheran church to offer services to homeless people, including making showers and barbers available every other Monday
 - 3rd: continuing appeals from the Red Door Thrift Shop schedulers for help and assistance to fill volunteer positions at the Shop.

- 4th: Going to the Masonic Lodge on Saturday morning and finding a plate of leftovers from Samantha on the front porch, with a plastic-wrapped foam mattress on the front porch, where she sleeps at night.
- 5th: Reading today's Gospel lesson about Jesus encountering the 10 lepers on the border between Galilee and Samaria
 - So let's start there,
 - because any story of miracles should lead us to think, "Where do we find God in this story?"
 - And Luke is very specific about where the story is located and where we find God acting

Jesus on the Edge

- In today's Gospel reading Jesus is still on the journey to Jerusalem from Galilee that began in Chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel.
 - And today we find him out on the edge in a number of ways:
 - First, he's just leaving the region of Galilee and going into Samaria, where no right-minded Jew would travel. (When Galileans traveled to Jerusalem they typically bypassed Samaria by traveling far to the East and then going up the uphill road from Jericho.)
 - And again, we find Jesus speaking with the marginalized: the 10 lepers who lived on the outskirts of a village
 - That's where we usually find Jesus...speaking with those who live on the margins, like
 - The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, a hemorrhaging woman, Zacchaeus the tax collector, lepers, the woman accused of adultery.
 - Jesus constantly moved toward those from whom others moved away: the marginalized, the forgotten, and the overlooked.
 - The message of Jesus was that God loved them all.

Our Mission on the Margins

- Many of the stories in the Gospels are about Jesus on the Edge, encountering people who are not part of his group.
- I wonder why it is that we have no stories of Jesus attending Bishop's Committee Meetings. ...(or few meetings at all).
 - The meetings we do read about were those in which he equips his disciples for the work they need to do out on the Edge, at the margins of society..
 - And I believe that is where we as a church should fulfill its mission
 - We who actively follow Jesus are called to encounter those who are not a part of our community of faith.
- If we look at our "Living in Faith and Community" logo we see CEC at the 8 o'clock position,
 - And if we were to imagine a series of concentric circles around the church,
 - We might see the clergy and the ministry support circle and the bishop's committee at the center,
 - Further out is the circle that includes other leaders and helpers
 - And then another circle for those who attend worship services, the men's group
 - The another circle has all those who attend church with less consistency
 - When we reach the edge of the farthest circle, we discover people who are not a part of the Christ Church community or even part of any Religious Community.
- This is where Jesus spent much of his time.
 - This is where we should perform our mission...at the edge
 - Where those who belong to the Community of Christ Church engage and interweave their lives with those outside the community.
 - There, on the border of our "Living in Faith and Community Logo" we fulfill our mission,
 - through service and justice ministries: helping, service, relieving suffering and sharing the Good News of Jesus

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- At the same time, when this logo was designed, we left the circle open at the bottom, with the idea that we would invite other people to join us inside the circle.
 - That's all well and good, but I believe it is up to us to do more than just invite others to join us;
 - We need to go cross over the margins; we are the ones who need to go out
 - That's where we will fulfill the mission of Jesus

The Red Door on the Margins

- We have, at Christ Episcopal Church, many paths that enable us to cross over the margins. However, one of the most visible and one that gives us ready-made access to the Edge is the Red Door Thrift Shop,
 - At the Red Door Thrift Shop, we encounter the elderly person who lives alone, feeling isolated, but who meets her friends in the shop
 - At the Red Door Thrift Shop is a middle class family who worries about losing their jobs, and has no ready cash to purchase school clothes for their children
 - At the Red Door Thrift Shop, an immigrant mom purchases toys and stuffed animals for her family.
 - At the Red Door come those who wonder about the purpose and meaning of their lives and who try to find the vocabulary to express their spiritual hunger.
 - At the Red Door, we often see Samantha, who needs a new change of clothes.

The Laborers are Few

- At the Red Door Thrift Shop, the volunteers are the intermediaries between those who would like to do something worthwhile with the extra clothes and household goods they have in abundance and those who have real needs.
 - But as Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.."
 - If I were King, I would make it a bylaw of Christ Church that every able-bodied member of the congregation would be required to volunteer at the Thrift Shop (just like Kiwanis Noon Club).

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- And the beauty of volunteering is that it's not a full-time job. Even a lunch hour once a month would be helpful; or a couple of hours a month would be appreciated.
 - We can't make it a rule that you have to work at the Red Door Shop
 - but I believe that the customers at the Red Door Thrift Shop represent the larger mission field entrusted to us by God.
 - They are the one of the primary reasons we exist.
 - Our volunteers and our Shop are the means of grace God uses to reach out to them.
 - Perhaps I can do a better job of reaching across that boundary if, —just like the Franciscan friars in Brooklyn who wear their clericals when they go shopping— perhaps I could reach across the boundary if I wore my clerical collar as I work at the cash register.
 - That might scare people off
 - Or it might remind people that the Red Door is more than just a Thrift Shop
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Where the Action Is

- The Red Door Thrift Shop is the boundary between our church and the world
 - And, fortunately, that boundary is not a wall
 - Instead, it is very permeable boundary,
 - Where we can reach across the edge and new people can easily enter into the faith community.
- I believe that it's on the edge, on the boundaries, where we find our mission.
 - The mission of the church is not in church planning meetings composed of church members talking with other church members about church business,
 - although those meetings may be important to strategize about the mission.
 - The margin is where the action is.
 - The action, for many of us, is at the Red Door.