

18th Sunday after Pentecost- Proper 23 (C)

Luke 17: 11-19

Oct 9, 2022

Christ Episcopal Church

Towanda, Pa.

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If you're like me, the prophets leave your head spinning. I confess to always have a hard time understanding the OT prophets. With that said, Elisha's and Naaman's story stirred a curiosity for me.

In both Christian and Islamic traditions, prophesy continues to be important. We know Jesus and John the Baptist as prophets throughout the Gospels. Our English word prophet comes from Greek and literally means "spokesperson". This expresses the understanding that the prophets were delivering divinely sent messages using words or revealing visions.¹ John the Baptist you remember, was preparing the way for our Lord through his pronouncements.

Scholar Eugene Peterson instructs that Prophets used words to remake the world; The world—heaven and earth, men and women, animals and birds was first made by God's Word. As Prophets arrive on the scene, they find the world in ruins, a world of moral rubble and spiritual disorder. This extends into our current day. [We can quickly observe that not much has changed in our modern world.] Their words, divinely received take up the work of words again to rebuild what human disobedience and mistrust [have] demolished. Their speech is learned and given by God. Their words are God-grounded, God-energized, God-passionate.²

As their words enter the language of our communities, men and women find themselves in the presence of God, who enters the mess of human sin to rebuild and renew.

Left to ourselves we turn God into an object, **something** we can deal with with **something** we can use to our benefit, whether that thing is a feeling or an idea. Prophets scorn all such stuff. They train us to respond to God's

¹ Michael D. Coogan *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament*. Oxford University Press. Pg. 245-246.

² Eugene H Peterson. *The Message - Remix* Navpress

presence and voice. We can be alerted to the voice of God—into a world of presence³ which moves beyond our sensory experience towards love and compassion acted out in our lives.

Some modern day prophets include the Dali Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King

In today's OT lesson, , Elisha is the prophet sending Naaman , a leper to go and wash and be made clean. Naaman was a celebrity of sorts, a wealthy distinguished military leader favored by the king, but at the same time he was also a leper. This changes everything! All of his power and all of his money could not heal him of the most dreaded disease of the ancient world.

To hear Elisha's command was offensive to him. His sin of human pride - his ego, caused him to reject God's offer through Elisha's words. He became angry at which point he would not respond to anything. His saving grace occurs as he is eventually able to swallow his pride and humble himself to believe and obey. This came only after an unknown Israelite slave go tells him "Just go and wash yourself in the Jordan River."

One of the take away lessons from the story of Naaman is that God meets us where we are. No matter how feeble our misguided our faith, he is looking for that one step that shows him that we believe in his existence and His power. The rest God will deal with over time.

In our gospel lesson today Jesus was on the border between Galilee and Samaria and was met by a band of ten lepers. We know that the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans; yet in this band there was at least one Samaritan.

Here is an example of a great law of life. A common misfortune had broken down the racial and national barriers. In the common tragedy of their

³ *Ibid*

leprosy they had forgotten that they were Jews and Samaritans and remembered only that they were men in need. If a flood surges over a piece of country and the wild animals congregate for safety on some little bit of higher ground, you will find standing peacefully together animals that are natural enemies and at any other time would do their best to kill each other. Surely, one of the things which should draw all people together is their common need for God.

The lepers stood far off. There was no specified distance at which they should stand, but we know from one authority it was laid down that when windward of a healthy person, the leper should stand at least fifty yards away. Nothing could better show the utter isolation in which lepers lived.

Reflection of this gospel shows it to poignantly demonstrate humans ingratitude. The lepers came to Jesus with desperate longing, he cured them; and nine never came back to give thanks. So often, we humans, once we get what we want, never come back.

(1) We may be ungrateful to our parents. There was a time in our lives when a week's neglect would have literally killed us. Of all living creatures human beings take the longest to become able to meet the needs essential to life. There were years of dependency on our parents for literally everything.

Yet the day often comes when an aged parent is a nuisance; and many young people are unwilling to repay the debt they owe.

(2). Often we are ungrateful to one another. Few of us have not at some time owed a great deal to another person. Few of us in the end satisfy the debt of gratitude we owe. It often happens that a friend, a teacher, a doctor, a surgeon does something for us which is impossible to repay, but the tragedy is that we often don't even try to repay it. (This point has given me a personal pause to write a thank you letter to my surgeon who performed breast surgery on me 6 years ago - leaving clean margins and a favorable health outcome). It should not have taken this amount of time to construct this note for sure! Time and distance may grant us perspective.

(3). Often though, we are ungrateful to God. In times of bitter need, in our desperation, we pray with great intensity; the time passes and we forget God. Many of us never even offer a grace before meals. God gave us his

only son Jesus to whom we may rarely offer thanks. The best thanks we can give him is to try and deserve his goodness and mercy a little better.⁴

May we hear the prophets who remind us and make real for us the power, presence and promise of God. Most of all, may know the Good Shepherd , hear his voice and attend to his call, welcoming all into community, and respond to God's hope and dreams.

⁵ And now to God, whose power working in us can do much more than anything we can ask or imagine. To him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

⁴ William Barclay. The Gospel of Luke - The New Daily Study Bible St. Andrew Press. 2001, pg. 257-259

⁵ Ephesians 3:20-21