

Sermon | Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost | October 9, 2022

Luke 17:11-19 | The Rev. Barnabas Pusnur

Today we are observing Indigenous Peoples' Day. It is a day to recognize and honor those who have been here before us. Those who have walked these lands. Those who have endured immense oppression and have persevered. Those who today enrich the world with their presence and contributions. And those who teach us a way forward- a way of mutual respect and love.

Humans have always struggled to figure out what to do with the so called 'other', the different, the outsider, the alien, the foreigner. Interactions with people groups different from us have often resulted in one of these things: either conquest & annihilation; or a second-class citizenship & discrimination; or a program of forced or voluntary assimilation. This has been true in all ages- ancient and modern.

As I was preparing for today's sermon, I noticed that today's gospel, the Gospel according to Luke, has quite a few stories about the 'other', the outsider, or the foreigner. I realized that in each of these stories Luke presents the outsider not as one who is to be feared & conquered but as one who is an example to be learnt from. I noticed six stories, with today's gospel story being the sixth, and this morning I want to us to take a brief look at each of these stories.

Jesus was becoming famous, but the people of his own hometown, Nazareth, rejected him. And Jesus saw that as evidence of how God's work of salvation went beyond a narrow tribalism and pride in one's own people. So, Jesus reminds them of two Old Testament stories.

He tells them, that there was a famine in ancient Israel during the time of prophet Elijah. This famine was severe and lasted more than three years and Elijah was starving. It is then that God tells Elijah to go to a certain poor widow who feeds him. In recounting this story Jesus says

though there were many widows in Israel, in God's plan Elijah was to be sent only to a widow who was a foreigner, from Sidon. Deliverance came for Elijah from a poor widow from Sidon. *The 'other' provided deliverance to God's prophet. How amazing that salvation and deliverance for the mighty prophet Elijah came from a poor widow from Sidon.*

The second OT story that Jesus recounts is about Naaman, the commander of the army of the King of Aram. Naaman was an outsider and suffered from a skin disease. He came to prophet Elisha and when as per Elisha's instruction he washed himself in the river Jordan Naaman was cured. Jesus again reminds the people that there were many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. *The 'other' experienced health and wholeness to the glory of God.*

These are two stories from ancient Israel that Jesus recounts, to show that God's salvation went beyond narrow domains. But it was not just in the ancient Israel, Luke tells us that Jesus himself had encounters during his ministry where the outsider was the example of faith & goodness for Israel.

A Roman military official once sent word to Jesus requesting that he heal a person who served him but was now ill and close to death. The official displays great faith when he says that Jesus need only speak the word and this person would be healed. When Jesus hears this, he is amazed, and "turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."" *The 'other', was an example of faith for Israel, an example that put to shame the lack of faith of all the people.*

But it was not just when the outsider did something good or beneficial that the outsider deserved respect. Luke recounts a story where Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and his disciples go ahead of him into a Samaritan village so that they can prepare a place for rest. However, the Samaritans did not allow Jesus and his disciples to stop at that village. Now there was historical animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews at that time. The disciples are so infuriated at the Samaritan that they desire ill for the village. But Jesus turns to his disciples and rebukes them and quietly goes on to another village. *The 'other' has an inherent dignity. For Jesus 'the other' is inherently worthy of respect.*

The most famous story of the 'other' being upheld as an example is the parable of the Good Samaritan, which among all the gospel writers only Luke recounts. In the parable an Israelite man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho falls into the hands of robbers, who loot him, beat him, and leave him half dead. Jesus says that an Israelite priest and a Levite happen to be on that way and when they see this beaten-up man, they pass by on the other side. However, a traveling Samaritan happens to go by the same way and when he sees the man he is moved with compassion. The Samaritan stops, goes to this man, bandages him, and carries him on his animal to an inn where he can be taken care of. *The 'other' is an example of one who shows mercy. To me it's a reminder that just as God shows mercy, this Samaritan showed mercy.*

And it is in this succession of stories that we hear today's gospel reading about another Samaritan. Jesus enters a village and as in the past his reputation precedes him, and people flock to him for healing. Luke recounts that ten people suffering with leprosy or some form of skin disease approached Jesus, kept their distance, and cried out "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!". Now leprosy was not just an illness, but at that time it resulted in a social and ritual exclusion. Those who had it were pushed

outside the margins of society. Only if a priest certified that they were cured, could they be allowed to re-enter the communal life of society. Jesus tells all ten of them to go show themselves to the priest and as they were on their way they were cured of their illness. One of the ten, realizing he is cured, turns back praising God with a loud voice and he prostrates himself at Jesus's feet and thanks him. This man is noted to be a Samaritan with the implication that the others were not. And then Jesus asks "Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?" *The 'other' glorifies God and is thankful to Jesus. He displays a gratitude that is lacking in the remaining nine.*

The pattern of the questions were the same: were there more widows in Israel who could have fed Elijah; were there not more people with skin diseases who could have been healed by Elisha; is there no one in Israel whose faith is as great as the Roman official; were they not other's who saw the man robbed and beaten; were they not ten who were made clean and yet only one returned? *The outsider, the so called 'other' is the one to be cherished. In these stories it is the 'other' who teaches, corrects, rebukes, and shows by example the way of love and faith.*

This country in its history sought its own benefit by seeking to conquer and annihilate the indigenous peoples of the land. It failed to realize the inherent worth and dignity of the 'other'. However, the indigenous people have proved their resilience through the years. Despite innumerable challenges, they teach us the way of endurance, the way of faith, and the way of love. We honor them, celebrate them, and make amends.

May this land and all its people- past, present, and future – experience the flourishing and wholeness that comes from the goodness & love of God. Amen.