

Our text on July 31st, 2016 was from Luke 9:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’ 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 Then he and his disciples went to another village.

Note:

Jesus is on way to Jerusalem

Samaritans didn’t welcome him

His disciples didn’t like that and asked him if they could call down fire on the unsuspecting Samaritans – the sort of request that any self-respecting Christian would make of someone who didn’t think as they did.

27 months later **we** arrive in Luke 17 – longer than it took Jesus but interestingly in today’s text there’s a connection:

Luke 17:11-19

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’

14 When he saw them, he said, ‘Go; show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?’ 19 Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well.’

THE TEXT:

Jesus is still on the road to Jerusalem from Galilee – that meant he had to go through or around Samaria; Luke tells us he’s on the border between the two culturally different areas. But he’s still going after the lost sheep of Israel and it seems Samaritans as well.

We’re not told what the name of the village is, but we do know that it was probably near the rubbish dump that the lepers lived – yes, they had rubbish dumps in those days (but no problem with single use plastic bags). These men both feel and are isolated, and rejected, and don’t participate in the life of the community. And if they were a mixed religious group (a border town) then it does show us, if we didn’t already know, that common misfortune breaks down ethnic and national barriers. It’s said that in floods where dry ground is at a premium, animals who are natural enemies will stand together. I guess people do too. You could argue from the text that 9 were Jews and one a Samaritan – it’s not totally clear.

It’s also not clear that they’re asking Jesus to heal them – they were looking for acceptance and community or as they put it, pity. Did they know about Jesus? Did they know what he could do? Had they heard the stories?

They cry out to Jesus Just like you’ve, no doubt, cried out from time to time. They were desperate and I’m sure that’s been the case with you.

This next part is interesting – (the words suggest they were mostly Jews), ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ That’s what Jews did, we don’t know about Samaritans. These are some of the questions I’d like to ask Luke.

AND AS THEY WENT THEY WERE CLEANSED! They had to do something – theirs was an active response.

Unless you’ve been healed of a life-threatening illness or been accepted by people who previously didn’t accept you or found a new beginning in your journey with Jesus you might not understand how these men felt. To be set free from the chains of leprosy must be one of the most powerful experiences the world – because of all it makes possible – community, family, an ordinary life; being like everyone else. Note Jesus doesn’t really say anything to them, he doesn’t touch them – they’re healed as if by the gracious overflowing goodness of Jesus – God, in Jesus, has come near to them, broken down boundaries of nationality and physical affliction as well as the boundaries set up by religious faith.

We don’t know what happened to the 9 but we do know what happened to the 10th, rather than go to the temple to praise God for his gift, he went back to Jesus, fell on the ground before him and said thank you - AND HE WAS A SAMARITAN. The most unlikely person in the group is the one to say thank you.

WHAT DOES THIS TEXT HAVE TO SAY TO US?

1. WHO’S IN AND WHO’S OUT?

This Samaritan belonged to a nation that was connected to, but quite separate from Israel. He had serious theological differences with Jews, he was ethnically different and most faithful Jews avoided Samaritans and the region where Samaritans lived. In fact, Jesus called him a foreigner.

So, let’s imagine how this could relate to us? I’d like you to use your God-given imagination at this point.

Did you come to church today expecting Jesus to be here? Well in one church they were, and he wasn’t. They went through the entire gathering – singing, prayer, giving, teaching - the lot. No sign of Jesus. At the end of their time they talked, no coffee there and then began to leave. At that moment one of the greeting team ran back into the church and said to the late-leavers, ‘Hey, I’ve just found Jesus! This drug addict nearly knocked me over as he ran towards the church shouting, ‘Guess who I just had a great talk with – Jesus? He’s cured me of my addiction. What? Is church already over? I wanted to come to your church because Jesus said he was heading your way; I wanted to come in and give thanks to God for my cure! Please don’t lock up, until I’ve come and knelt at the front of your church and said thank you to God.’

Who’s in and who’s out? Where is Jesus working? There seems to be this relentless tendency in church to confine the boundaries of God’s kingdom. There seems to be this ever-present temptation for us to hunker down with our fellow Christians and call that the full extent of Christian living.

If we do this, we haven’t really grasped what Jesus is about and why he came; and why had had encouraging words to say to a foreigner.

William Willamon tells of growing up in Greenville, South Carolina. Every morning as a teenager he got on a bus to go high school which had written on it, ‘**South Carolina Law. White patrons sit from the front. Coloured patrons sit from the rear.**’ He comments, ‘nobody I knew ever questioned that sign, especially no one who sat next to me in church on Sunday.’

At 16 he was sent by the church to a youth conference and he was put in a room with another young man from Greenville. ‘When I walked in, he sat on the bed opposite mine., better prepared for me than I was for him. We’d never met although we went to school very close to each other; I’d been told never to go near the place he lived. He was black.’

Willamon remembers nothing about the conference but he does remember talking with his room-mate that first night 'til dawn – they talked about school, church and neighbourhoods – their lives. By sunrise he'd had his world skilfully cracked open, exposed and infinitely expanded. Later he looked back on that time as having experienced a conversion. Especially conversion in terms of a new way of seeing. He could say with John Newton, 'I once was blind, but now I see.' You say what has that to do with us. And I simply say **LOTS!**

It's not always clear who's in and who's out – it was the outsider, the foreigner, the different person, the other race who came back to say thank you.

A church, not so far from us really, had a financial crisis; an appeal to the members was made to get through the crisis. And they responded. Within two weeks they'd raised most of the needed funds. The treasurer was overjoyed. Then he said to the minister, 'we've got a problem.'

'What do you mean, we've got a problem?'

'The problem is that the largest gift came from the owner of the pub just down the road.'

'What? Why would that guy make a big gift, I don't even know him?'

'Well,' the treasurer said, 'he put a note in with his cheque saying, 'I'm not surprised to hear you guys need more money. With all the good you do in our town and all the people you help, I'm sure there are limits. Here's my little gift; blessings to you in your work.'"

It's not always clear is it? How we receive, and welcome foreigners/outside/different people is crucial in our understanding of Jesus. We can so easily make the wrong assumptions. Rita Capon?

2. BEING THANKFUL; BEING GRATEFUL

After doing the 'Habits of Highly Missional people' earlier in the year I decided to carry out a little experiment. I haven't done it consistently but the three things I've tried to do as I live in the community is smile at as many people as I can, say thank you as often as I can and say sorry as often as I can. Of course, I haven't done this in church – smile I mean, after all church is serious, and I don't want to put people off by being too friendly. I think I've tried to say sorry and express thanks but if you're feeling bitter because I haven't to you, please tell me.

Anyway, I've had some interesting reactions – I've had lots of response in Dunedin and it's led to some interesting conversations; I have to say trying the same tactic in Australia wasn't anywhere near as successful – they're overly serious there; you can see they're insanely jealous that we've had the same government for over a year.

I know it's trite beyond trite but the words 'living with an attitude of gratitude' seem to be wise.

Like the woman, for instance, who was reached out to and welcomed into a church; which, was interesting, because she was an addict and she was homeless.

A family was assigned to do what the church needed to do so that she would be truly received as Jesus had received them. The wife said, 'there were two years of disappointment, frustration and occasional wonderful surprises; it was hard work that stretched our patience and our finances.'

Alice had been off alcohol and drugs for a year and was thriving in a new job, SO the minister thanked the family, in this case, the woman, who was instrumental in Alice' recovery.

The woman responded, 'you should thank Alice, before she joined us we were in danger of becoming a club for sweet and nice old people. Alice made us the church!' Ouch!

Jesus commented on this man's origins and current state, but he still reached to him.

What are we - a club for sweet and nice mostly older people or are we the church? What do you think? More importantly what do the people around us think? Perhaps we should ask them.

And as a final question – would the Samaritan have been welcome here?