

Pentecost 18 and Thanksgiving Sunday  
Sunday, October 9, 2022  
Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

Quick geography lesson here: Jesus is maybe a three or four day walk north of Jerusalem at this point. Samaria and Galilee are two regions, let's call them provinces, that are right next door to each other. Samaria is also the name of a city just a few kilometres from the border with Galilee.

So Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee, and if two places are right next door to each other there's not much between them, and although there wouldn't be a border between the two places like we know national borders now, there's something about this place where Jesus and ten lepers are walking that makes it a border place.

Just think for a minute about borders that we know. A few years ago you'll recall that time when there was a fairly steady stream of people from all over the world crossing the border at night from North Dakota into Manitoba. They weren't sure they would be welcome south of the border, so they were taking their chances heading north of the border to see if they could be at home here. And you never know, in those borderlands, whether you'll find a home.

We hear the same kinds of scenes on a larger scale playing out on the border between the U.S. and Mexico, and lately we've heard about people crossing that border and being put on busses, sent off to another far away place.

Whatever the politics of the whole thing happen to be, it always means that there are people leaving one place where they're not welcome, and going somewhere else where they might still be unwelcome. Stuck in a kind of border region between not being at home and, well, still not being at home.

In a different way, our own borders were in the news again a few months back, and the region between Samaria and Galilee, or, um, between North Dakota and Manitoba, became the focus of so much anger, when protests blocked the border at Emerson and in Southern Alberta and Southern Ontario. There was so much anger going all directions, and fear, and people feeling at home or not at home or supported or reviled.

These border places are tricky.

It's where Jesus meets ten lepers, and they all meet up together in the region between Samaria and Galilee, in the borderlands. It's a political border, but it's another kind of border for these ten. They've got this skin disease that makes them unwelcome wherever they go. We don't know what the details of the disease really are, but we do know that as long as they suffered from it they would not be able to be part of the everyday religious life or social life of their communities. It's in the religious codes, it's in the social code, everybody just knows that these people are unclean, to be avoided... For ten lepers on the road that day, they're not just in the border region between Galilee and Samaria. If you were one of those ten, you'd be on the border between two places that don't want you; two places that just see you as a leper. Unclean. Contagious. An outcast.

On the border between two places that won't let you be at home.

Jesus is passing through the region between Galilee and Samaria, that same in-between place as those ten. He's leaving Galilee for good, and almost everything we know about Jesus happens in Galilee. All that healing and teaching we hear about, all that eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners and also religious leaders who have him to their homes. All those parables he tells, and trips on the stormy inland sea, that great great feast on a hillside with thousands of people.... Galilee is where his childhood home of Nazareth is, it's where his home synagogue happens to be.

And now he's leaving Galilee behind. The only place he's really known to live and work. He's in a borderland of his own and on his way to Jerusalem, where he'll spend his last few days, and he seems to know what's waiting for him there. He's been loved and accepted and feared and rejected in Galilee, he'll be loved and accepted and feared and rejected in Jerusalem. And now, in the region between Samaria and Galilee, he meets ten more in the borderlands.

That's where Jesus lives and moves. He's always passing through the borderlands. And when he meets ten people who are outcasts and unclean and unwelcome he tells them to go, and as they go they're healed by the word that he speaks. They cross a border from being unwell to being well.

What's your borderland? What's our borderland? What's the place between Galilee and Samaria for us or for you? Between a place you know and a place you have yet to know or maybe just don't want to know but have to? A familiar place you leave behind and something new on the way that you can't

really imagine. A home, a country, a stage in life, a relationship, a health status, a changing world? Maybe your own borderland is a feeling that you're between one place and another, and neither one is really home, or you don't feel welcome wherever you are.

Jesus is passing through those borderlands too. Or maybe that's just where he always is. Period.

Think back again to those ten who Jesus meets on the road today. They call out to him: "Have mercy on us, Jesus." They cry out for mercy, but they never really say what mercy might mean to them. Do they know what they're asking? Maybe it will look like healing, but maybe one of those then, he's thinking that "have mercy" means "will you look me in the eye" when you walk by? Or maybe another one of those ten, she's just asking, "Will you notice that I exist?" Maybe for another "Have mercy" means "Ask me my name, stop and talk for awhile," or maybe "have mercy" means "Act like I'm important; don't push me aside." Have mercy – be at home in my presence. Have mercy – don't act afraid when I'm around. They never say what they want, what "Have mercy" means. Healing might be too much to hope for. But maybe they've heard the stories, and they know that if anyone will show them some mercy, some kindness, some kind of care, it's Jesus.

We might join them and cry out ourselves, "Jesus, teacher, have mercy." And who knows what that mercy will look like? Who knows what mercy we need the most?

Well, we have an idea. We've heard the stories, like when Jesus heals that centurion's favourite servant, or when he ate dinner at a respectable leader's house and he welcomed the kindness of a woman with a questionable reputation. She taught the respected member of the community something of her own about grace and love.

We've heard the stories of mercy, like when Jesus feeds a few thousand just because it's dinner time and the shops are closed, or when he says the weak and the poor and the ones who grieve are the ones who are blessed.

We've tasted this supper together, where we are at home and we belong, right here.

We say "Jesus, have mercy," because we've heard that Jesus is known to show mercy; to feed, to welcome, to challenge and still love, to give rest to anyone who is so very very worn out by life or just another long day. We've heard that Jesus will show mercy, will extend a hand of hospitality or will receive our hospitality (come Lord Jesus, be our guest); make a home and sit at a table with us, wherever our table happens to be.

So what does all this have to do with Thanksgiving? Maybe this: We all live in borderlands of our own. We're always between one thing and another, one time and another, one place and another.

And in the borderland we spend this weekend of Thanksgiving. Tasting good things or hoping for good things, trusting or sometimes struggling to trust in the goodness of God who gives so much.

In our borderlands we find ourselves in this weekend of thanksgiving...living

in the midst of abundance or of scarcity, or somewhere in between....in the company of beloved ones or in company we can barely stand but maybe just have to now and then. Mercy is given to us here; what does it look like now?

This weekend of thanksgiving, maybe in the company of no one at all...because maybe you prefer it that way....or your best company and most beloved are far away...or in the company of no one at all because it seems like no one really wants you, in Galilee or in Samaria. What does mercy look like?

Jesus meets us in that borderland, wherever we are. And we simply trust that Jesus will show mercy to us too. It might look like kindness or forgiveness, it might look like friendship and laughter, it might look like honesty and being taken seriously, it might look like a quiet moment alone or a loud laugh at the table. It might look like, "This is my body, my blood, my life given so that you might have life, we might have life, in these borderlands. So we say, "Jesus, teacher, have mercy." And mercy is poured out on us today.

And we cross the border again, from dying to rising, from being broken to being made well, from being lost to being at home.

AMEN.