

It's Not Over Until...
Preached by
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October 24, 2021

For Reflection:

*We would rather be ruined than changed;
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.*

by W.H. Auden

Psalm Reading : Psalm 66:1-12 portions

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
sing the glory of the name; give glorious praise.
All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.”
Come and see what God has done: God is awesome in deeds among mortals.
The Lord turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.
There we rejoiced in God, who rules by might forever,
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of the Lord's praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.
For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.
You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;
you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Meditation: IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL...

I am often asked how I choose what I preach on—not necessarily the text itself, but how do I decide the focus from within the text. The answer is that the image (and note that I said “image” not theme) —I get a picture in my head. In any event, the image for the day pretty much chooses itself when prayer, the Bible, the Spirit, news in the world, our congregational life and individual lives all find

space together in my imagination each week.

The other quite frequently asked question has been, “The text (to whichever one they are referring) has so much in it—why didn’t you talk about all of it? This may mean “Why didn’t you preach on the part I’ve been wondering about?” Besides the slightly facetious response that we only have an hour, I usually respond that one of the besetting sins of almost all beginning preachers—one I committed myself with great frequency—is to “attack” each text as though the first occasion is the only chance we’ll have to address it in a 30 year career. I am now content to focus on one thing and wait for other occasions.

That having been said, while I’d be the first to admit that almost all scriptural texts have depth, complexity and layers that offer multiple opportunities for preaching, my great fear has been, having preached on a text once, there would be no new inspiration the next time it rolled around. I am occasionally “reassured,” shall we say, by reminders that people don’t remember sermons anyway, so it wouldn’t be a problem if I preached the same thing twice.

This is not the first time I’ve preached on this text, not even the first time at UCF. This is one of my favorite texts. There is at least one sermon in every sentence. I could preach on this text 12 weeks in a row and not break a sweat.

None-the-less, I stuck with my typical practice of reading and re-reading the text aloud, walking around my office in a largely left-of-center Protestant Church in 21st century USA, serving a congregation like so many others wondering when post-pandemic life will be restored and what our ministry will look like when it is. at a transitional point in its life: like most—somewhat anxious and wanting to be more energized and effective in ministry; in the midst of a month reflecting with gratitude on the bounty of our lives and faith community.

Along with Jesus, ten lepers and some on-lookers, and all of us, it quickly became a crowded room. At least it was crowded, until I realized that, as they say about the interpretation of dreams, we’re everyone in the dream—we, the church, are everyone in the story, playing different roles at different times.

We are a church seeking a little mercy, a little grace. We’re not asking for too much—a few more people, larger class sizes, a few more volunteers, a little newer technology, a little more money, a lot more mission, more relationships with our neighbors. We’re just asking for a little of this, a little of that—some mercy.

Like the ten lepers, we ask, but keep our distance, avoiding the front pews—just in case healing brings not only joy and comfort, mobility and freedom, community and welcome, but lands with a thump; or comes with a little more responsibility than we wanted; a few of the people we hadn’t intended to invite; in case healing changes things or, worse yet, changes us. So we’d like to be healed, but we don’t want Jesus to get carried away as he has been known to do.

And don’t you know, that’s just how it happens. We have a little more energy, a little less anxiety, not a whole lot more money, but we’re spending more of what we do have on the things we think are important. The Spirit’s continued to show up in meetings, in worship, in zoom classes and blood drives and collections to help our neighbors; in cards and prayers for our homebound, ill and those living restricted lives for one reason or another—caregiving, or childcare or underlying health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID 19 even with vaccinations. Healing is happening—the kind of healing that makes for wholeness and new generations of faithful service. Jesus says, “Go. As one people, name your bounty, the grace of God in your lives. Go. Act like you are healed.” And that’s what we’re doing...

But the healing isn’t over. Apparently it’s not over when we’re doing better, feeling better because we are able to meet in person and life is gradually assuming some normalcy, even if it is new

normalcy.

According to the text, the healing isn't over until ... It isn't over until we turn and give thanks and praise to God—until we fall on our knees with gratitude, until we get up and go on our way into the world singing songs of praise and sharing the news of a merciful God—until our gratitude is so great we have no choice but to put ourselves, body and soul, into living, sharing and serving.

The truth is that we are never fully healed, but then we are never as broken as we allow ourselves to believe. It is in the rhythms of knowing our need, asking for mercy, accepting God's grace, naming the bounty and giving thanks through sharing and service that we will hear the blessing and affirmation of Christ, "Our faith is making us well," moving us ever toward wholeness and our created goodness." So, let us get up and be on our way.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

Gracious God: In this season when shadows of clouds race across the earth, when cool air from distance places blows our way and the sun shines down on it all – we are reminded of a planet, a world, a nation all under your care and formed by your breath. We are reminded of gifts and needs among people we do not and may never know – we are reminded we are not alone in blessing and in need.

We turn our prayers to the planet that its powers for self-healing might once again be unleashed, as we are better and better stewards of all the earth.

...

We turn our prayers to people in every place, celebrating weddings, welcoming babies, grieving loved ones with words and ways not our own. We pray for the day when all these things come in their own time, not driven by starvation or disease, fear or war, violence or hatred. We pray for the power to do the things that make for peace in our lives, homes, schools and workplaces.

...

We turn our prayers to ourselves and our loved ones, our neighbors, friends and co-workers—so that the healing we first seek for others, we might know in our own lives, bodies stronger, minds more clear, relationships reconciled, hope growing, patience and strength in the waiting for that which is to be and that which may not be as we wish

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom and the power**

and the glory forever. Amen.