



MINISTER
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28th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 14, 2007

Luke 17:11-19

Call and Response

Intro: Our New Testament lesson comes from Luke and it is a story about a call for healing and a response of grace. It is about how nine people, and one person, then respond to that gift of grace. In our reading, Jesus encounters ten lepers, who ask for mercy. Let us listen for God's word to us.

“Call and response” is a concept that I have loved ever since someone first showed me on a piano how musical phrases can talk to each other. I know this is elementary for many musicians, but the idea is that one set of notes can ask a question and another set of notes can answer that question. Janice, can you give us a quick example of this? (play a little) Jazz music is predicated on this idea, there is something asked, for a moment things feel unfinished, and then an answer comes and it comes and goes back and forth and hopefully by the end everybody is tapping their toes and delighting in the music.

Musically, the phrase “call and response” originally referred to work songs sung by slaves. A leader would sing or call out the first line and others respond in unison. It made their dreadful work into a song, into a

prayer that was offered up to God. And somehow hope was kept alive and grace was present as these songs were sung. In almost all of the Psalms, there is the common characteristic of pain being stated up front, pain that is met with God's response of grace. “Help me”, and help comes. “We're hurting” and healing follows. Again and again, pain is met by grace. Pain. Grace. Call and response.

One of my favorite preaching professors explained how African American preaching has that same kind of rhythm and feel to it, in church the phrase “call and response” is used to describe when a preacher set out a phrase “it may feel like Friday” and the people of the congregation respond “But Sunday is coming”, there is a give and take, and back and forth and the preaching becomes something the congregation

participates in, not by silent listening, but by responding. Everybody feels like they were an integral part of the sermon that way. Presbyterians don't do that so much. While we don't often verbally respond to the word preached, we do believe that we are to respond to God's living word - with our lives. We are to live as though the word we hear is asking something of us, calling to us to respond, and that we answer with what we do and how we live with one another.

I see call and response in our text this morning. This is an extraordinary story. There is a real humanness to it. Jesus was on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem and on the road he encountered ten people, each of whom suffered from leprosy. That is to say they were physically sick and socially rejected. No one wanted to have anything to do with them, probably not even their families. The ten were a company of the miserable. “Jesus, master, have mercy on us,” they called to him and he responds with mercy. “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” travel the road to the ones who could certify that leprosy was gone and these people were once again fit for normal human relationships.

In essence, Jesus said go and claim your full place in society, start walking the road ahead as if you are healed and you will be healed. On their way to the priests for verification, suddenly they were made clean. When that transformation took place, when they went from hurting to healing, nine kept on walking to show the priest. They took this miracle, this good fortune this as entitlement to walk right back to their lives

they had been left behind by leprosy. That was the response of the majority. The nine. But in that God given transformational moment, there was one who stopped in his tracks, ran back to find Jesus, fell on his face at Jesus' feet, and thanked him. Jesus asks about the other nine, where are they? Were they not also healed? Then he says a very interesting thing to the grateful man at his feet: “Get up and go on your way: your faith has made you well.”

Now notice that we don't know anything about this man's religion. He is a Samaritan, but we don't know what his theology is. We don't know a thing about his moral values, whether he is for or against this or that. We don't know how he voted or how he spends his sabbath. All we know is that he recognized a gift when he saw it, returned to say thank you, and Jesus said to him, “Your faith has made you well,” which surely is to say that by Jesus' definition, faith and gratitude are very closely related, that faith without gratitude is maybe not faith at all, and that there is something life-giving about gratitude.

Notice also that the man's wellness is more than being rid of his dreaded disease. Wellness, wholeness, —some scholars translate the word wellness as “salvation”: “Your faith has saved you,” in which case being grateful and saying thank you are absolutely at the heart of God's plan for the human race and God's intent for each of us.

The basic Christian experience is not obligation or guilt, but gratitude, gratitude for the gift of life. Gratitude for the world.

Gratitude for dear people who grace and enrich our lives. Gratitude marks the difference between the person who believes that life is theirs only, to do with as he or she wishes, and the one who understands that life is God's gift, to live out in joyful thanks and praise. Gratitude marks the difference between the person who comes to worship periodically out of duty, and the one who knows she will be here Sunday after Sunday, joining her voice in the crescendo of hallelujahs, because, in so doing, everything that has unfolded in the week behind her is now enfolded in the grace and mercy of God. Gratitude marks the difference between the one who looks at a healing as the result of having the wisdom and substance to choose the best medical care, and the one who recognizes her healing as God's act of love in her life

Gratitude marks the difference between those who are measured and cautious in their giving, because they look upon their resources as possessions that must be hoarded against some future scarcity, and those who give generously and thankfully, viewing their resources as gifts from God and one more way in which they can joyfully serve God. This stewardship season at Community Presbyterian Church, we have been grateful for the music, the people, the youth and the mission of CPC - each a vital part of our community. And we are thankful for the ways this congregation makes a difference in our community and our lives. We know how lives are changed and challenged by an awareness of God's gracious presence. The question is how will we respond, how will we say more than a

passing thanks?

A response of gratitude comes when you and I recognize that God's grace and mercy have touched our lives, surrounds our lives, sustains our lives and gives our lives meaning and purpose. Gratitude is the central characteristic of authentic faith, it is the clearest sign of our true spiritual condition - it is a measure of our soul - . Gratitude has the power to save us, to make us whole. It is at the very heart of our faith it is the basic human response to the goodness and mercy of God and to grace, God's undeserved and unconditional love for us.

At the heart of Christian experience and teaching is not guilt, as we have sometimes been taught; not obligation, as we occasionally conclude and teach; but gratitude, pure and simple - for God's grace, gratitude because all of life, all of it, is a gift we did not earn but were given.

The leper who returned to give thanks to his God, knew where he had been. He had been an outcast, when his healing took place, he knew he had to go back to his God to give thanks. Before enjoying his new place in the world, he responded to God's grace by expressing his gratitude. So he travels the road back to the source of his healing to say thanks face to face. Nine others made a different choice. Face down in the dirt giving thanks to his God, that was his response to the call and claim on him by Jesus. We're lepers. We are still struggling to be whole, to recognize the full humanity of our selves and our sisters and brothers.

We have a ways to go, we are people who are traveling toward redemption. As we hear Jesus ask were not all ten healed? We know the source of all our gifts is our God. So the call for us is the question, ----- how will we respond? How will we express our gratitude? Amen.

This special music is about racial equality, about healing hurts of injustice. Listen for the hope and trust about change that can come.