

I love healing stories! I talked about healing last week... All healing is miraculous! I've been dealing with this broken hand a long time. I saw the Doc this week and guess what? It still feels pretty stiff, and I seem to have lost a knuckle, but basically, it's healed. The Doc says I slowly start to resume normal activity. It's seemed to take forever...

I remember when my son, Jon broke his leg. He needed surgery, and when we met with the orthopedic doc, he said "he'll be fine. He's young, he'll heal quickly," Sure enough, I remember being surprised how quickly he healed...

That's one of the things that happen when we get older, we don't heal as fast. But whether it happens quickly, or slowly, healing is always a miracle. God created these bodies with miraculous capabilities.

Jesus heals the ten lepers in our gospel reading, and it is a huge miracle. And there is also another kind of healing that happens, a healing of the soul, and that's what I'd like to reflect with this morning.

According to the Torah, well Leviticus specifically, if you had Leprosy, or other kinds of skin conditions, you had to leave the community. You were cast out, considered unclean. And this was in the best interest of the public. They were concerned about spreading disease. A lot of Leviticus is like reading Health Department regulations.

And the only way to go back home, was to show yourself to the priest and have yourself declared clean. Then, and only then you could go back home, go back to your family.

Jesus encounters the ten lepers between Samaria and Galilee. Jesus is “in between” two places. This is no man’s land... Luke often uses geography to point to spiritual landscapes and this is a good example. Jesus meets ten marginal people in a marginal space. In other words, this encounter happens in a place where people don’t belong; people are not there by choice, but by circumstance...

And one of the ten lepers is a Samaritan. This is sort of a double whammy. In the eyes of good Jewish people, Samaritans were considered to be sub-human. While Samaritans considered themselves Jewish, the Jewish people considered them to be dogs. Culturally, Samaritans were looked down on.

In other words, even though these ten people had leprosy in common, the Samaritan was the lowest on the totem pole. He was the outcast among the outcast.

I can imagine the other nine lepers thinking, “Well, leprosy is bad, but it could be worse, at least I’m not that guy; at least I’m not the Samaritan.”

And I have to wonder what the Samaritan was thinking when they were calling to Jesus? He’s probably thinking, “yeah, sure, he’ll heal those guys, but he won’t heal me. I’m a Smartian, I’m not one of them...”

Luke is using geography to describe a spiritual dilemma. The dilemma of not belonging. This poor man is not only separated from his family, he is separated from the other outcasts as well. He has nowhere to belong...

And then, miracle of miracles, he hears Jesus say, “go and show yourselves to the priests.” It’s plural. Samaritans had their own Priests. In other words, the outcast

amongst the outcasts, realizes that Jesus noticed he was a Samaritan, because he had to go to a different kind of priest. And when he noticed he too was healed, he was surprised, he wasn't expecting that...

And in his surprise and wholeness he had to go back and praise Jesus... This is the healing of his soul; this is the miracle of belonging. The Samaritan was an outsider, who Jesus brought into the fold. As Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well."

The other nine were also healed, and in their privilege, they were happy to go show themselves to their priest, and go back home to their families. I imagine they were also very grateful. What is remarkable about the Samaritan is that he recognized the larger miracle. He saw it for what it was-- the breaking down of barriers that separated people from God, and separated people from each other.

Quick story... I was really surprised when I started feeling a call into ministry. It seemed the like the last thing in the world that someone like me would do. I was working at the Shepherd's Center in Cannon Falls. Networking with the community churches... I had been recently baptized...

I was meeting with church leaders, hanging out with the pastors, and they started telling me about the aging program at Luther Seminary. My sense of belonging was getting deeper all the time. I remember going to the Luther Seminary website, looking at the degree programs.

And for a guy in his forties to be going back to school was scary! I kept wondering if I belonged there. My classmates were all recent college graduates, who majored in religion... What did I know! Could I remember how to write a paper? Could I handle the reading? Would they accept me into a degree program? I kept wondering if I belonged there or not.

I remember one of my first papers, the Seminary Professor asked us to write a short reflection on what our goals for the class were. I was very practical; I was completely honest said my goal was to pass the class! She appreciated my honesty and really went above and beyond to encourage my learning.

And I have such vivid memory of all the affirmations I received... In one of my Old Testament classes, we had to write a lot of papers. The Professor would always begin each class handing them back. He would come up to me with a smile on his face, hand me the paper, and say “this is right where you belong; you’re in the right place...” And I would melt into those words, he was so encouraging... And believe me, I worked hard...

One day in chapel, I remember looking around at all my professors and friends, and having an overwhelming feeling of connection. I remember thinking, “These are my people.” I never knew I had a people before, but deep in my soul these were my people. It moved me to tears. I was exactly where I belonged.

This miracle of the Samaritan's healing is also our miracle... And that's the good news-- in this church, in God's Kingdom, you matter! You belong right where you are. Belonging is a miraculous and wonderful thing. God has claimed you in Baptism and you are a child of God... There's no where you can go to be outside of God's Grace...

Cannon River and Cross of Christ have a rich history of welcoming people in. We used to all be Swedes, and now you've even let a Dutchman in. As we have in the past, we will continue to be congregations of welcome and love to all.

We are planted in this soil; we are neighbors with each other. This is not only where we belong, this is where we are links in a chain that stretches from our predecessors to our children and grandchildren. Many generations...

God brings us healing, belonging, connection, and wholeness all the time. And every day when I go out visiting people, I always hear stories of how church friends call one another and check in with them... Cards and letters... Bringing food... Baking cakes... Giving rides...

And I love how church friends gather outside of church-- to eat, play together, love and support each other, just a big family...

You see, church is a bond, church is our community, church is where we gather to worship, to sing the songs of our faith, it's here we bring our kids to be baptized,

it's here we gather around the table, the body and blood of Jesus, it's here we live in hope and bury our families...

Oh, make no mistake, we are a community fraught with all the same things as all communities-- but we are one in Jesus. This is where we belong...

We really have a lot to celebrate; to be grateful for. Let us be like the Samaritan and give thanks and praise to God.

Amen...