

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, October 13, 2019**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 28/Proper 23/Year C**  
**Primary Text: Luke 17:11-19**  
**Sermon Title: “20/20 Vision – Part 2 – Be the One!”**

**Theme**

*Jesus’ mission includes making the unclean clean again. Unexpectedly, a cleansed Samaritan leper becomes a model for those who would praise and worship God and give thanks for God’s mercy. This second week of our annual stewardship campaign we will be reminded of the love, grace, and mercy of God and asked how we demonstrate our gratitude.*

**Text**

<sup>11</sup>On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup>As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup>they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” <sup>14</sup>When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup>Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup>He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup>Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? <sup>18</sup>Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” <sup>19</sup>Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

## Sermon

There is a strong theme of "faith" running through the readings for today. And while that is really no surprise, it works well for me for this second installment of the "20/20 Vision" Annual Stewardship Campaign, entitled "Be The One."

In the First Reading we have a story that requires some context.

Aram, referred to in verse one, was an enemy of ancient Israel, and we can deduce that within the passage because the unnamed captive, a young girl, was captured from Israel – not something we would expect from friendly nations. The commander of the army of Aram, Naaman, took her for himself and made her the servant of his wife. I would have preferred the term *slave* here because I doubt the girl had any choice in the matter, but that has little to do with the story or my point.

The story indicates that Naaman had leprosy, but that was a common name for any skin disorder. It is likely it was some other disease because leprosy, more specifically known today as Hansen's Disease, is contagious and debilitating, and if he would have truly had Hansen's Disease he would likely not have been able to lead an army.

As you heard, the servant girl suggested that Naaman go to see the prophet Elisha who resided in her homeland. Now, you may have noticed that there is a part of the reading that the lectionary editors left out, and in that part, Naaman went to his king, the king of Aram and reported what the servant girl had said. The king appreciated the loyal service of his commander Naaman, so the king wrote him a letter of introduction and gave him gold and silver and fine garments as gifts so that the king of Israel would be inclined to make this healing happen.

Eventually the meeting between Naaman and Elisha happened – sort of. I say, sort of, because after Naaman arrived at Elisha's home, Elisha never came out, never even saw all the gifts of gold and silver and fine garments. Rather, he sent a message that Naaman was supposed to wash in the Jordan seven times and be healed. Naaman was insulted and enraged. He thought he was owed better treatment than that and then made a prejudiced comment about the quality of Israel's rivers. But in a humorous moment, his own servants asked him why what Elisha asked him to do was such a bother to him since it was such a small

prescription, and added, if the prophet had asked something difficult he would have done it without argument.

He eventually reluctantly did the easy thing, he washed in the Jordan seven times and was healed. I'm not sure how much faith Naaman had in the process. I'm not sure it even mattered, because God had a greater purpose than mere healing for all these characters. God used the servant girl, an enemy king and army commander to reveal himself to a Gentile nation, and as a result, Naaman became a great evangelist for the God of Israel.

In the Gospel Reading we have another story about people afflicted with leprosy. In ancient Israel, true leprosy, Hansen's Disease, required its victims to live in colonies outside the cities where the healthy population lived and to announce their presence in order to not afflict others. This is the situation that prompted the encounter with Jesus.

Notice that Luke specifically mentioned that the lepers 'kept their distance' and announced themselves while at the same time begged Jesus for mercy. And also notice that Jesus never touched the men in order to secure their healing. That was not an act of precaution. Rather, Jesus simply demonstrated that he could speak healing and more than healing, wholeness too, and it would happen.

He gave them instruction to go and show themselves to the priests. You see, being healed and being *declared* healed were two different things. Only a priest could declare one healed and that was what they wanted so that they could once again re-join the community.

Well, off the ten men went and Luke wrote that

<sup>14b</sup>as they went, they were made clean.

All ten afflicted men believed *in faith* that Jesus' instructions would somehow heal them, and so all ten went off to see the priest. But along the way, one man, a Samaritan, noticed that he *was* healed, and turned around praising God and fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The other nine, I presume, were healed along the way too, but simply did what Jesus told them to do and continued on to the priest.

Now, it's a long story, but the Samaritans are the half-breed cousins of the Jews, but as such, the Jews considered the Samaritans unclean – leper or not. Ironically, it was this man, the Samaritan, that returned to give thanks to Jesus. Jesus noticed and asked the man,

**17 “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; *your faith has made you well.*”**

I italicized the phrase "*made you well*" because in the original Greek that phrase is more like, "your faith has *saved* you." The difference is that, for all we know, all ten were *healed* of their leprosy, but they still needed the approval of the priest to be considered whole and restored to community. But the one who came back recognizing that Jesus was the source of his healing found *salvation*. It could be argued that the other nine were healed of their skin disease, but still suffered from the condition of their mortality, while the one was both healed of his skin disease and *saved for immortality*. And though Luke didn't say, he probably went home to Samaria where he told everyone what God revealed in Jesus Christ had done.

Well, last week I told you that **faith is like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it will become.** Do you remember that?

Had Naaman the commander of the Aramean army let his pride win the day he would have missed out on a miracle healing. But as a result of just enough faith to wash in the Jordan River, he was healed and became an instrument of God's greater purpose, to make a great evangelist within a foreign and enemy kingdom.

And the one leper, and a Samaritan at that, could have also continued on and had his miracle healing. But as a result of his acknowledgement of who it was that brought that healing, he received well more than mere physical healing, he was saved for immortality, and more than that, he became an instrument of God's greater purpose, to make him a great evangelist within a foreign and enemy kingdom.

Throughout this annual stewardship campaign season, I will remind you of the importance of exercising your muscle-like faith. I do that for a number of reasons.

One is because of our proposed Vision Statement that you will vote on in January, which is

**Proposed Vision Statement:**

**To be a thriving congregation vital in the community.**

I hope you see the significance of that. Not many of us are actually out there inviting people in, so in order to draw others to us, we have to have something to offer them, and that is more than assistance in the form of food once a month, as important as that is. We have to be a spiritually thriving congregation where people's spirits are fed and their spiritual lives are nourished – both our members and those who we have not yet met, after all, this is Christ's church and all belong here; we belong together.

We have made a number of cost-saving changes and for that we have received a little push-back. Well, let me remind you that everything got more expensive in the last year. So if your contribution to your church has stayed the same for years, or has even decreased because of retirement or some other life-changing reason, that has contributed to being a thriving congregation vital in the community more difficult. And so once a year the Give Table and I make the big ask.

I know pastors who rather smugly say they never lead stewardship campaigns in their churches. "Our people just do the right thing!" They are deceiving themselves. The average Lutheran contributes between 2.5 and 3% of their family income, even though the Bible very clearly indicates that faithfulness is represented by a first fruits tithe of 10% (first fruits meaning before anything else including income tax). (Giving Trends in the ELCA, Kenneth Inskeep)

Clear talk about tithing often upsets people. That is on you, not on me. My call is to simply speak the truth in love, so let me be clear about this. More than a numerical value, you have to be a good steward of what God has first given you. For a few of you, 10% is too much. For most of us, 10% is simply insignificant.

In the vows of ordination I was charged to lead using my own example in faithful service and holy living, and in that manner, I want you to know that Carol and I give more than 10% before taxes to this church, and in addition we give to many causes within and outside this church, to the ELCA, and to other interests that we

embrace. We can afford to, and we do it joyfully, in thankful response to all that God has given us.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

How about you? Will you be the one who says to your spouse, "We need to take another look at our faithfulness. We have been blessed and we need to do more. We need to do the right thing."

I know you all have heard it before, but I want to re-tell the story, titled "Whose Job Is It, Anyway?"

*This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.*

The story may be confusing but the message is clear, and applied to our church and our personal stewardship it could be said that everyone presumed somebody else was going to do the right thing so they wouldn't have to. But in fact nobody did the right thing and so little got accomplished – and as a result there was *no thriving congregation vital to the community*.

"Oh pastor, things are not that bad." You are probably right. Just because three Lutheran churches in Mahoning County have closed in the last few years and others have merged, and numerous others of other denominations have closed doesn't mean Zion will. You are right. God will not close a church that is thriving and vital in the community.

So finally, will you be the one?

Will you *be the one* who comes to the conclusion that you really aren't all that spiritually fit, and you want to strengthen your faith muscle by working it out more?

Will you *be the one* who does an honest spiritual inventory and comes to the conclusion that you have more faith-muscle to exercise than you have been using?

This week, you will receive a letter from the Give Table encouraging you to fill out the enclosed Commitment Card. Though we still have two more weeks of the campaign to go, please prayerfully consider your joyful, faithful response and get it back to the church as soon as possible.

I hope you share the 20/20 Vision that we want to be, and God wants to bless us to be, a thriving congregation vital in the community.

You be the one to make that vision clearer.

### **Prayer**

Merciful God, though we are not worthy of your grace, your grace comes to us anew every day, and we thank you for it. Send your Spirit into our hearts and minds that we will be inclined to be used for your greater purpose in making this church a thriving congregation vital in our community. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen