

## Living In-Between

Today's Gospel reading, which is a continuation of last week's reading finds Jesus on the road, heading to Jerusalem. He has taken the 'shortcut' from Galilee by going through Samaria, a route that most loyal Jews would not take because it goes through the region of the Samaritans. As you know, the Samaritans were, to put it mildly, not liked by the Jews and all avoidance between the two groups was to be avoided at all costs. However, we see Jesus traveling this route. At first reading, this story is a simple, straightforward story where Jesus isn't breaking any of the rules, isn't pushing the boundaries of what is expected, follows all the customs of dealing with lepers and even instructs them to do what the law requires them to do in order to be declared clean so they can return to their communities. Many a sermon has been given by staying at the 'surface' of this story, having a 'feel-good' sermon that lets people be glad that we have gathered together to praise God and thank Jesus for all that He has done for us. These sermons might even point out that the Samaritan's faith not only made him well, but actually saved him as the Greek should be translated; drawing out the difference between being healed and being saved. These are all valid and significant points to draw from this story of Jesus' encounter with the 10 lepers.

Today, I want to take a closer look at one of the details that Luke includes in the story, one that can be overlooked if we rush to the healing and reactions of the lepers. That detail is where Jesus was when this took place. Luke notes that they were in the region between Galilee and Samaria. This is kind of a buffer zone between these two regions of people who didn't like each other. Not in one but also not in the other. This was an area where most people didn't linger. It was kind of like 'fly-over' country. If you have to be there, either you're there for as short a time as possible, as in just passing through; or you had business to do in that

area; or you have to be there because you can't be anywhere else. In short, you were in-between destinations.

The lepers that were living there were in-between. Neither the Samaritans nor the Galileans wanted them in their own areas because of their disease. From anyone who was just passing through, they asked for whatever the traveler could spare, in order to help them eke out a meager existence. The lepers were there for the in-between time of being declared unclean due to their disease and when they could be declared clean and return to their communities, reunited with family and loved ones. In essence, they were quarantined from their communities. They were not just in 'lock-down' as we experienced a couple of years ago at the height of the COVID epidemic, but they were locked away, even more isolated than what we felt in 2020.

This leads us to ask, "What are those in-between places that we can experience today?" Just to name a few examples, there are:

- Adolescence - that time of growing up where you are 'too old' to act like a child, yet not old enough to be considered an adult.
- Changes in our relationships - the loss or change of a friendship or an intimate relationship that can happen for many different reasons.
- Major health care decisions - which includes the realization that we can no longer do all those things we could do when we were younger.
- Job transition - changes in our jobs, not only in taking a different job but also changes in our current job descriptions.
- Death of a loved one - this changes not only our relationship with the person who has passed away, but also how our community relates to us.

I am sure that you could think of and have experienced many other ways in which one can be living 'in-between.'

As a community, we have experienced this same kind of being 'in-between.' As a church, as a people of God, we have been experiencing and going through this living 'in-between' for quite some time now, often without realizing it. The COVID epidemic has made us more aware and even has hastened some of these changes. These changes have touched nearly every aspect of our lives.

As a people of God who believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer, we have been chosen and set apart. Not set apart from the rest of the world, from the world of non-believers, but as an example to them of how to live in relationship with God through Jesus. We will always be living in those 'in-between' spaces, always on a journey, always at a crossroads, not here, but also not quite there, until that time of the Second Coming when Jesus will return in His full glory and fully establish the Kingdom of God here on earth. We are to be 'in the world, but of the world' as described in the New Testament.

From this Gospel reading, we have the assurance that just as Jesus came to those lepers in their in-between time, Jesus will come to us in our own in-between times. When we do see Jesus, the choice before us becomes how and for what do we ask Jesus for help, for mercy? Do we ask for help out of those particular in-between circumstances; or do we ask as the lepers did, sensing that maybe Jesus can give us more than what our limited imaginations can request. On one level, the lepers were asking for anything that could get them through that day, get them through until the next traveler comes by. But by asking for mercy, they were letting Jesus decide what to give them. I doubt if any of the ten lepers were expecting to be healed of their leprosy, but I can be sure that none of them told Jesus that it was too much to be given to them. When we ask Jesus for help during our in-between moments, do we give up control to Jesus and let Jesus decide what we truly need in that moment? When we ask Jesus to heal us, do we just want our symptoms to go away, or do we allow Jesus to make us whole again.

Do we ask Jesus to heal us, make us well; or do we let Jesus give us what He knows we need? Are we willing to admit that we are in-between and need help to get to our final destination?

In just a short while, Nolan be baptized by which he will be claimed by God to be in a special relationship through Jesus. Being in that relationship, he can be assured that, like the lepers, when he turns and asks Jesus for mercy, he will receive much, much more than he could imagine. I pray that as he grows, both physically and spiritually, that he relies on Jesus for help and guidance.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/IeHKdFPGk04>

Service: <https://youtu.be/DXJg2B8JiG8>