

"10%"

October 13, 2013

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Sama'ria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

We live in one crazy messed up world! Every single day we are bombarded by thousands of messages and pieces of information. Each message tries to be the one that gets through and changes us and our perspective. We have all these avenues and means to convey and communicate who we are.

My personal favorite is Facebook. I love it. I am an avid user and find it too much fun to stay connected to colleagues and to others in our church. We, as a becoming more and more common rule, choose to communicate via a social networking web site rather than person to person, or via a simple and convenient cell phone call. It can be a lot easier to hide behind our computer screens and convey what we are truly 'feeling' to the world. We even have the advancement of Twitter and Facebook alerts so that the very moment our lives seem to change we can share that information with our hundreds of true friends. Because you know you are not really my friend until it is official on Facebook. Sorry!

Then there are even those crazy people who have not yet gotten the clue. They are not a part of Facebook, or Linked In, Instagram, Pinterest or one of those other sites. They might not even have a cell phone or email regularly. They are obviously not a part of the moving and transitional world we all live in. They are just not with it! I mean how could we honestly be the unique and wonderful people we are without these means and methods of conveying our individuality and our 'true' selves.

It seems to be a part of human nature to like to come together over a common bond. Whether this bond is we are all studying, the same thing in school or we all have "FarmTown's" on Facebook. We inherently like to feel and believe that we are a part of something, no matter how insignificant, alongside others.

We also really like routines, schedules, and knowing what to expect. As much fun as birthday presents and Christmas presents are they are still an expected part of our years. We, as a norm, do not like surprises. We like to find our personal comfort zones and stay there only changing a little bit and pacing ourselves, of course, as time goes on.

Let me share with you a bit of my own struggle and experience with this sort of norming process. Most of us know and can remember at least a part of what it feels like to start college. It is a crazy and emotionally complicated time. It is the first time we are 'truly' on our own away from our parents. It is the first time we get to make all of life's important decisions. It is the first time we have to be somewhat responsible for ourselves. The entire experience is filled with a lot of firsts. It is great! It is terrifying! It is this wonderful and dreadful time...all at once!

Well, there I was my Freshman year at Ohio University, the original, all set to begin. Now, I had grown up a good Disciples kid. I was always involved in youth stuff and I guess you could call me a leader. I had it in my head as I went to college to find some Christian Organization on campus and try to norm my life around that sense of belonging. I knew that I needed that sense of belonging. I also naively knew that all Christians believed the same Gospel. So we of course

had to believe in the Gospel the same way. There was only one way of believing and that was in Christ and hooray that was all that was important. Everything else was just insignificant and part of our traditions. But it was not part of our core and the core was what mattered!

I have never been more shocked or confused as when I really became a part of Campus Crusade for Christ. Now your Freshman year they get you involved in Bible Study and help you find friends near you in your dorms. Suddenly you have this great group of friends who do not pressure you to do things you do not want to do and who like to have fun and talk about God. I thought this was wonderful and great and I was learning oh so much about my faith. I was a part of something and we were doing things together and really living out the Great Commission. (which is Matthew 28: 19-20 in case you'd forgotten)

Well, we are not talking about the Great Commission today. We are talking about ten lepers and how one separated themselves and surprised Jesus. Oh, yeah. Wouldn't you be surprised if you had miraculously healed ten people and only one came to say thank you? And of those ten that one that came to you was a Samaritan. Now, it never really says if the others were or were not also Samaritans but that is often the assumption. That assumption makes it so much more likely that they, the ten lepers, had only come together because they were on the outskirts of society due to their various skin diseases. They had come together due to their common bond and thought that that was enough.

Then along comes Jesus. That man who liked to shake up the norms. These ten cried out to him and he answered. Now of the hundreds who cried out to him throughout his ministry and of the hundreds he must have healed. Luke brings us this particular instance. It does not fit the normal story pattern and we need to be aware of how it does not fit. Some of the non-norms are because Jesus first off healed a large group of people there were ten healed at once. Another interesting point was that it was the lepers calling out for Jesus to heal them. A third non-normal sequence in the healing stories of Jesus is that Jesus did not heal them right away but sent them to the priests. It was only as they went that they were healed. Then comes the kicker. One sees that they were healed and turns back. Now, we cannot know if this person was just more observant than the others or if they tried to get the others to come back with them. Luke does not tell us. We can only go by the story written.

This one out of ten turns back and shows a bit of individual faith. They had a faith not necessarily dependent on the group dynamic but rather separated themselves from that group and gave, as Jesus says, "praises to God."

Only one did this, out of a group of ten. One set themselves apart and surprised Jesus into asking about the faith of the group. Jesus says "were not ten cleansed and only one returned to give praise?" I mean if I was Jesus, and it is a good thing I am not, I would probably be a tad confused and ask the same question.

Then the dynamic changes again and Jesus calls the person a foreigner, meaning they were definitely different from him, and says too that their faith has made them well. I had to ask the question about the other nine were not they also faithful in following what Jesus asked of them. They went to the priests as told and also were healed. What made the difference between the nine and the one? What makes that 10% that one so special? I happened across this quote, this morning in fact, that I want to share with you, "It's better to walk alone than with a crowd going in the wrong direction." - Diane Grant.

That one most significantly headed in the direction towards Christ. That one seemed to realize they could stand in their faith alone and confidently. Without the group support. That is hard to do. We live in a crazy messed up world. Jesus is not asking us though to step out of our groups and our comfort zones. Rather Jesus is just using this Leper to show how faith can be just as significant for one as they head towards him as it is for the many who also follow him and his direction.

This really hit me. In this crazy messed-up world ran by networking groups and peer pressure and craziness. We can stand firm in our faith as an individual. It is okay. As Disciples, we as a denomination tend to struggle with the opposite problem. We know, and I mean really know, what our faith is as individuals but struggle to know what we are a group. We like to stand firm in believing that the only significant things are our core beliefs where we are unified, everything else we have some sense of liberty in.

I would like to think that this parable is an acceptance of both kinds of faith. We need inherently the groups. We need the sense of belonging and feeling a part of something. Then in addition, we have the societal pressures of individualism. We also need to be ourselves, the unique!

So we can be both. We can be the individual with the unique understanding of faith and God. Then too we can be a part of a group who shares in that common denominator bond thing.

We just have to do it together. We need to do things together that unify us and also allow us to be individuals. It's a difficult thing especially in seminary to find your own voice in faith. But that is part of the fun of the journey. Learning together and coming together in a common bond and then when a point in our lives change we learn how to stand alone as a person of faith individually. We learn how to be that 10%. Amen.