

Sermon for Sunday, October 13, 2013 Luke 17:11-19 "Made Well/Making Well"

One of my reminders of middle age and beyond is what happens just about every day when the mail arrives. Invariably there is at least one piece of correspondence relating to medical stuff – either an insurance statement or a bill for the copayment. I'm not unique in this – I suspect that every one of us who are past 50 have this experience.

We go to the doctor, we get fixed, and we pay. Thank goodness for medical insurance, because most of us would not be able to pay for care for our medical issues without it.

So the bills come in, and we send off a check or pay the bill online. It's a transaction, pure and simple. A service is provided and we pay for it.

Is this what is going on when we hear today's gospel, where Jesus heals a group of lepers, and only one comes back to say thank you? Is Jesus is unhappy because he didn't get paid in words of thanks? Because only one, and indeed the most unlikely one, a Samaritan, said thank you? It grieves Jesus, not because the Lord expects payment for his work of healing, but because those words of thanks are a recognition that God has done something remarkable in those lepers' lives.

Should Jesus have sent a bill? Perhaps he might have sent something that says "Jesus Medical Center LLC. Your insurance has paid two words of thanks for your treatment. Please remit five words of praise and thanksgiving. Payment is due immediately, or the fires of damnation will lick at your ankles!"

It doesn't work that way, of course. Jesus attends to our needs of heart and mind and body because he loves us and doesn't want to see us suffer, not because he expects payment.

But a little thank you, a little acknowledgment that God's power is so great it can even fix those deemed unfixable, is not so great an expectation. Even Jesus likes to hear that we understand where the good things in our lives comes from.

And thus the Lord's reaction to the absence of gratitude...he wonders how quickly these newly cured lepers have forgotten how life was before they were healed, how only one seemed to remember and be grateful.

And Jesus responds with a statement that seems a little redundant: "Go, your faith has made you well."

Umm, Jesus...he was already restored to health. No more leprosy. You just did it a little while ago. Why do you say at this point "your faith has made you well?"

Maybe it wasn't about the skin disease. Maybe it was something else that was made well. Maybe this Samaritan was somehow healed of a broken relationship with God. Maybe he learned to trust a Jewish rabbi, which was counter to every single thing he had probably been taught as a Samaritan child.

Maybe it was not only his skin that was changed, but his heart. And the mark of the change was not just cleared skin but the grateful appreciation the now-cured man showed. The Lord healed his skin disease and he responded by acknowledging the Lord's divine power in making the healing happen. For this man, the curing was a conversion experience, one that generated a healthy soul.

Ah, yes – conversion. Henri Nouwen reminds us “to be converted means to experience a deep shift in how we see and think and act. To be converted is be clothed in our right mind, to come to ourselves the way the younger son did when he was starving far from his true home (Luke 15:17-20). It is a shift of attention in which we set our mind on divine things (Matt. 16:23). “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).”¹

For each of us – and we each have had some sort of conversion experience or we wouldn’t be here in this place – the conversion in our own hearts that says “I acknowledge the gift of Jesus Christ in my life” demands that we also respond.

What does the response look like?

The start is that “thank you” that the healed leper said by returning and thanking Jesus. But another part of it is what we do after we say thank you.

When something marvelous has transformed us, we want to shout it to the rooftops, don’t we? We want to share that feeling with those who long for it. We want everyone to know how it feels. But how to make it happen?

We give.

We give so others can participate in our vision of how we have been healed, converted, transformed. We give so we can help others even as we continue to be healed, because healing is not a one-moment change, it is a lifelong process.

We give, too, because when we see our lives and our world and our church in this way, our priorities and our relationship to our resources shifts – it is a tool for the building of the reign of God.

And in doing this, we are not merely carrying out a financial transaction, as if we are paying God for fixing us. We are building a relationship between the people we now understand ourselves to be, part of the Body of Christ, and the work we are called to do, to spread the word and to transform the world.

Today you will receive your pledge packet. If you look at it as a burdensome obligation, a check you need to write like a check for your medical bill, you’re missing the point. It is, instead, an opportunity to bring the same kind of conversion of heart and soul that you have experienced to others who so desperately need it, as at one point or another we all have needed it.

Have you been healed? Has your heart been lifted? Has your life been transformed? Do you want to partner with God in transforming other lives? Go back to Jesus. Say thank you for your healing, your conversion, your transformation...and know that it will continue for the rest of your days. Then pledge to bring that experience to others by giving generously, not just to keep the lights on and the temperature regulated, but to be a light to the nations. Make it possible for others to be healed as you are healed. Give, because the Lord has given so much to you. Amen.

¹ Henri Nouwen, “The Spirituality of Fundraising,” p.4