

When Yes Includes A No

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between October 9 and October 15 Inclusive

October 10, 2010, 20th Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 17:11-19](#), The Message; or [Luke 17:11-19](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart, Luke 17:11-19](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Note: This sermon was preached October 14, 2007 at Edwards (Knox) United Church.

This story of the 10 lepers is a story of healing. A story of thankfulness. A story where healing is transformational and isn't. A story of where saying yes includes a no.

We read and hear this story out of the context of our culture. Our culture is radically different from the context of the story. For them the experience of healing would be seen as normal. For us, though, we struggle with its miraculous aspect. We are not so sure we are comfortable with that. To understand requires an new understanding of miracles , not as some breaking of what is natural, but as a transformational event that is unexpected: we could not have predicate its outcome. Reality as we experience it has been changed.

This is what happened to the lepers. Yet they go on with their life as if nothing has changed. They remain in their self-understanding as lepers, but now with healed skin.

But one of them wakes up and says no. He says, "I am going to return and say yes and thanks." In doing so his healing is transformational. True his skin is different, but how he defines himself is transformed. No longer is he a leper with healed skin, no longer is part of that leper community that reinforces his identity. He says no to it by saying yes to the healing. He has experienced restoration. He says yes to a sense of God who wants him to experience a fuller flourishing of what it means to be a person. "It is a mode of healing wounds and 'repairing the world'" (Taylor - p 17)

It is hard for us to understand their view of group identity and role definition. We are so part of a history which has defined us as independent persons, who live in a world of open possibilities of who we will become. True we have a cultural sense of ourselves as being part of this community, this nation yet part of that identity is one of where we can control and determine our self-flourishing.

In Jesus time group identity defined you. Being a leper may have made you an outcast, yet you still had a vocation of begging and a group that you were part of - a shared community. Often being healed was a disruption. Thus it was a big step to say yes to Jesus and say no to a former way of life.

We can still see that world view still operative when people define themselves by their broken experience. Because they still hang onto their former problem and define themselves by it, their healing has not been transformational. Transformation would allow them to redefine themselves as flourishing. It is true that former destructive habits are hard to overcome yet by defining oneself as recovering may actually keep alive the negative experience. To overcome this, many in the recovering movement redefine themselves by healing others for they find that their healed wounds now lead them to repairing the world. It has been a movement to saying yes to compassion which is also a no to the past.

The question still before us is what has this to do with visioning? What does it mean for a church to say yes and what then are the things that we have to say no to?

I have begun to read Charles Taylor's book, *A Secular Age*. It is helpful for it describes the context of our world and what it means to be the church given secularism. Often we define ourselves out of nostalgia. One form of secularism is there is relief or regret that we have lost an earlier age of faith or piety. There was a time where the church had some control - positive or negative - over identity. Then there is the type where we worry about the loss of identity - a turning away from God. These are things like, we don't say the Lord's Prayer in school or attendance at church is down. Taylor identifies a third type which really defines our reality. And it is a more difficult reality for the church.

This is where belief and unbelief are equal options for us to follow. And the unbelief option does not make one a inferior person but is just another satisfying way of flourishing - of being a full human being. Believing in God is one human possibility among others. There are a plurality of options. This is the reality where our whole context of understanding takes place. This context is where our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place. There are many valid and competing options for self-definition. This is the world in which we work out our sense of meaning, where we are seeking a sense of a fuller life, a richer life, a deeper life that is more worthwhile. A place where what we do and say count and creates a better reality. That our activities matter.

This desire is shared by both the believer and the unbeliever. In fact, many find human excellence in being a good person without any religious grounds for it.

We often don't articulate this issue. This is the culture the church must speak to. In response we often think that a better technique will attract people. If only we could find the silver bullet our church would be revitalized. To find a vision we need to know the geography of our times. We need to be realistic about the zeitgeist (sensibility) of our times - the emotional/feeling sense of our times. And that reality is, being religious is completely optional.

Still we do live in a time where many wonder what is all about. There is a certain sense of ennui - a sense of yearnings and dissatisfaction with the way things are. There are tons of secular answers to this state of being

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May the Lure be with you

- from the Secret to Oprah and Dr. Phil. In that mix, the issue for the church is, what kind of experience can it offer to address our times? This is a reflective process that touches our most inner self. It not about true belief, as if there was the correct theological construct. Nor is it merely true action - that doing good is all we need. It is action that is grounded in the sense of holy hospitality that asks for a yes that includes a no.

We have to come to terms with this reality - saying yes this is how it is. This frees us from seeking easy fixes, believing in a magic bullet. It is to see what is it that grounds us and to share that. It is the question of whether God actually matters to our daily life? That a sense of God actually does lead us to a fuller and flourishing life in the here and now.

In the story of the lepers we have a narrative where God seeks the flourishing of human experiences - wants for us to be more fully alive. In the giving of thanks we also see that flourishing has two aspects. The first is a sense of saying no to other things, and placing God at the center of our heart. It is a call to center everything on God which is to renounce those things that negatively impede our flourishing. Secondly this seeking for a fuller life is not an end in itself - it is directed to a larger context, to the healing of the world. This moves us beyond self sufficiency, to see ourselves as part of a web of relationships. This is a giving and receiving. This is to understand our vocation is one of sensing there is a higher goal than self sufficiency - that the love of God is found within our world, in every nano-second of existence - and we can partake in the love that God has for us. We are not alone - we live in God's world. That is what we have to contribute to the creation of the future of our shared existence.

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