

# “Of Health and Home”

Luke 17:11-19

14 October 2007

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor  
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

## **Luke 17:11-19**

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

Prayer.

Our gospel lesson for this morning, uniquely found in Luke, takes us into two different directions, both of which are hot topics in today’s world. One is health care and the other is immigration.

So, let’s talk about health care.

In the time of Jesus it was quite common for the diseased to group together. If one had leprosy, they were considered unclean, untouchable, and forced to live outside the protection of the city walls or on the edge of town to minimize the risk of contamination. Of course, others would be found here. This was a convenient location by the side of the road from which one could beg- for alms, for food, for mercy.

Not only is this quite possible that Jesus and his disciples would have encountered groups of individuals with leprosy, or similar diseases, as they traveled, it was a certainty. They would have encountered groups of sick, diseased and dying outside of every town they came to. Jewish law, and it’s strict interpretation and application of cleanliness laws, would have divided families and neighborhoods.

It doesn’t take too much imagination to consider the word ghetto, from the Hebrew, literally a bill of divorce,<sup>1</sup> and to apply it to our gospel for today. Jewish society had divided itself, creating a system of haves v. have nots, inclusion v. exclusion, salvation v. damnation.

Let me see. Can I envision a time and place where health care creates a system of division?

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghetto>

In an August 28, 2007 article in Forbes,<sup>2</sup> it was reported that “a record number of Americans are without health insurance, according to new U.S. Census Bureau statistics.” “The number of people without health insurance coverage increased from 44.8 million in 2005 to 47 million in 2006,” reflecting a net increase of 2.2 million individuals. “The problems of the uninsured are particularly acute among children. “19.3 percent of children in poverty had no health insurance.” From 2005 to 2006, the number of uninsured children in America rose from 8 million to 8.7 million, a rise of nearly ten percent.

In 2006, employer health insurance premiums increased by 7.7 percent,<sup>3</sup> and we are told it will be another 10% this year. Total national health expenditures was \$2 TRILLION in 2005, or \$6,700 per person. Total health care spending represented 16 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). U.S. health care spending is expected to increase at similar levels for the next decade reaching \$4 TRILLION in 2015, or 20 percent of GDP.

We have created a system of health care delivery that is on par with the ancient approach of abandoning people outside the city gate. Business wants reform; they can't afford rising health care costs. Individuals want reform; we have the power of the ballot box, but we've never been able to break the log jam. Talk has been going on what seems to be forever, yet nothing is getting done, and the gap grows wider.

Instead of asking “what would Jesus do?” we should ask, “what did Jesus do?”

Jesus healed them all.

Every one of those ten lepers walked away, did as they were told, showed themselves to the priests, just as Jewish law requires, and everyone of them were healed.

Jesus healed them all, and so should we.

The era of faith-based health care delivery is fading fast. And if I would blame anyone for the mess we are in, I wouldn't point the finger at doctors, lawyers, insurance, or CEOs. I call us to look inward. The religious community has outsourced health care to big business and government, when we are the ones who need to be following the example of Christ.

Jesus gives us the charge and the gift of healing. He teaches us the methods (who can forget the approach of the Good Samaritan?). He is calling us to leave no one behind.

So what are we going to do about it? Some parishes have re-entered the health care field, by hiring a parish based community health nurse. Some have opened free clinics, dependent upon the commitment of volunteer clinicians and donated supplies. A few denominations speak aloud their public policy voice in state and national capitals.

But this is just a drop in the bucket. A lot more needs to be done, if we are to follow our Savior's example and charge.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/health/feeds/hscout/2007/08/28/hscout607734.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nchc.org/facts/cost.shtml>

The second topic raised by Jesus is, surprise! Surprise! Immigration. Isn't it something how modern and up to date the Bible is?!!!

Jesus is traveling from Galilee, in the north, to Jerusalem, 90 miles south, through the region between Samaria and Galilee. Jewish Samaritans meant different things to different people, depending upon your ancestry and point of view.

To Jews whose ancestors had endured Babylonian exile over 700 years earlier, Samaritans had been those left behind, forced into collaboration with their occupiers. They had inter-married resulting in bi-racial offspring. And Samaritans were those who had been forced to relocate the Temple, due to travel restrictions to Jerusalem, to a new local temple on Mt. Gerizim, the traditional location of the near-sacrifice of Isaac<sup>4</sup>.

To Jews who lived in the hilly region north of Judah, centered on the city of Samaria, they considered themselves the faithful ones. They hadn't faced the judgment of exile. They resorted to survival tactics in the midst of an unmerciful occupier, doing what ever it took to survive and to remain faithful to God. They despised those who eventually returned and rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. By the time of Jesus, the Samaritans were treated as if they were second class Jews.

To Jews who lived in the north, in Galilee, where Jesus matured and ministered, Samaria was a place most travelers avoided. Best to go around to make the annual visit to Jerusalem and the Temple. Take the road down the Jordan Valley instead of the high road through the mountains and hills of Samaria. Avoid Samaritans, and you won't have to deal with them. Treat them as if they are invisible. Blame them for all that is wrong with our country, because, well, it is better to blame someone else than to take responsibility for the self.

Does this sound familiar? It sounds like to old South to me.

It sounds like Mexican-American immigration to me.

It sounds like immigration policy that gets debated and distorted in the halls of congress, just as it has been for over 200 years of our existence. One of the late night comedians made light of our hyprocrocy this past week commenting on Columbus Day .... Something to the effect that "only in America do we celebrate the discovery of a land that had already been inhabited by a people."

Luke, the Gentile physician, reports one of the ten returned, a Samaritan Luke intentional highlights, who prostrates himself at the feet of Jesus and thanks him. Jesus asks

*'Were not ten made clean?  
But the other nine, where are they?  
Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?'*<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerizim>

<sup>5</sup> Luke 17:17-18

So, I ask, what kind of example are we following when it comes to our personal or corporate immigration policy? Will we take the poor, the diseased, the downtrodden, the refugee? Or do we only allow in the brightest, the smartest, those who can contribute most? Will we, immigrants, or the descends of immigrants one and all, continue to welcome to our shores those searching for freedom, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

One doesn't have to go too far back to experience the rich heritage of immigration that positively effected our church. German immigrants settled here, farming the muck of western Wayne County, speaking German, worshipping in German, and raising their families – our families – to be productive members of society. Faith was deep and rich, not only because of their new found freedom and their Evangelical roots, but also because of their memory of what they left behind; servant hood, toil, war, famine and suffering.

So now there is talk of building a fence, to keep immigrants out. There is a cry of national security. Some insist that English be the only language. Discrimination based on racial profiling, faith, and ancestry has never been as harsh. God forbid if your first name is Mohammad, or your last name is Martinez.

What did Jesus do?

Jesus elevates the foreigner, the immigrant, the migrant, for doing the right thing, for returning and giving thanks to the Lord. And like in so many other situations, Jesus responds by the command, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'<sup>6</sup>

We can do the same, too.

It begins with changing our attitudes, ending our resistance to change, and the acceptance of others, simply the way they are: created beautiful and perfect in every possible way by a loving and merciful God.

We don't have to agree with others, but we do have to tolerate and respect each other. We don't have to worship the same God, but we do need to insist that all have the freedom to express their religious needs however they see fit, and without outside threat, risk, or danger.

We do need to stand up and speak out, both in the voting booth and with our lobbying efforts, to keep our society a melting pot of immigrants, always refreshed with new members, respectful of our history, knowing that diversity makes us strong.

We need to embrace immigrants, not because it is a Democrat or Republican issue, but because it is a Jesus issue, and we must not let our voice be silenced.

Health care and immigration. These issues are too important to allow them to be dominated in the world of politics. These issues are deeply rooted in Christianity; in our history, experience, and tradition.

---

<sup>6</sup> Luke 17:19

Even more importantly, however, these are issues that Jesus addressed in his life and in his ministry. They are just as important today as they were 2,000 years ago.

Do not let them just slip away with our apathy or fear of confrontation. Stand up. Speak out. It is the only way God's kingdom will one day come. Amen.