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FMC Reedley
Luke 17:11-19
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Borderlands

This is a sermon based on an imperfect metaphor. The borderland is not only a place between places but also the meeting place of different identities or a mixture of identities. This is because when the lepers met Jesus, they were not only healed, but Jesus transformed their identities. I also use the term “ability” and I mean it in the disabled/abled sense. As in our ability to walk, hear, see, etc.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our healer and borderland trespasser amen.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As I read this line I gain a greater appreciation for who Jesus is. Jesus the traveling Rabbi. Jesus the border crosser. Jesus the healer.

I can also think about the identity of the people that Jesus heals. They are men, lepers, and at least one of them was a Samaritan.

Jesus and the ten lepers are not just one-dimensional, and neither are we.

We are as Paul said, male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile. Or to use more modern labels, we are different genders, ethnicities, classes, ages, and abilities. I bet many of you do not think about many of these labels on a daily basis. Unless it really matters. When I broke my right finger pointer in high school it really impacted my daily life. Not only did I have to figure out how to write with my left hand, but the week after I broke it there was a school bowling party. And I kept reaching for the bowling ball with my right hand, only to bump my thick cast against it. Remembering it now the image is quite comical.

This reminds me of a time when I was at a Mennonite convention workshop. And the facilitator asked us what parts of our identities or bodies do we think about most. And I responded, “the parts that hurt us.”

The lepers cried out to Jesus for him to have pity on them. They cried out because this leprosy was what hurt most in their lives. They may have been men, Samaritans, or Jews, but what mattered most right now was their leprosy. Leviticus devotes the whole 13th chapter to Leprosy law. It reads that someone with a skin condition should present

themselves to the priests who proclaim them either unclean and isolates them or clean and welcomes them back into the community. So when Jesus is sending them to the priest, that's not the healing part, the ten men have to go there to make their healing official. Like it's not real till it's Facebook official, it's not healing till it's priest official.

But Jesus was healing on the borderlands. The space between Jew and Samaritan. Between clean and unclean.

The borderlands are not just physical places, but also borders between the different parts of ourselves. The ten men are brought together by their shared isolation because of leprosy, but after they are healed, they are no longer lepers, but Jews and Samaritans. I'd like to think they will continue to be on the borderland where their religious differences do not get in the way of neighborly love. Or maybe on the borderlands people of different faiths create families together, creating children that are both and neither.

Don't get me wrong the borderlands are dangerous. It is hard to hold two groups together or to be a member of two groups, even if they worship the same God. Some differences are easier than others. As I look out at this group. There is a diversity of gender, age, and ability. When you take this whole church together both early and late service, there is a diversity of ethnicity and class. And I know that the borderland of ethnicity and class is much more difficult. Nevertheless, many of you persist in building bridges between our two services, to our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters, or a bridge to younger people.

As I imagine Jesus in the borderlands between Jew and Samaritan. Leprosy and smooth-skinned.

I wonder what sort of borderlands God is calling you to. The borderland across genders, ethnicities, classes, ages, or abilities? And in what way is this church a borderland, welcoming in people just as they are? I'm thinking about the handicap-accessible door on the ramp entrance that the council approved to help people of different abilities enter this church. I think about Vacation Bible School, Bethlehem village, Sunday School, and Kid's club that tries to make our children feel a part of this church. I think about how our two services are primarily in two different languages and with two preachers so that people don't have to be one type of person to feel welcomed.

But what if you yourself are a borderland? Rent apart by two contradictory identities within you, but both are true. This is for people who do not fit in as male or woman or whose parents are from two different cultures or religions. In this situation, feel strongly

the need for Jesus's healing, not to change me, but the healing that welcomes me into the community. Like Jews and Gentiles mixing to become the church. So what does it mean for the church to continually become something new? A borderland onto itself? I'll leave you with a poem by Gloria Anzaldua.

What does it mean to be a borderland? You're a donkey, ox, scapegoat, Forerunner of a new race, Half and half - both woman and man, neither; A new gender;

To live in the Borderlands means to put chile in the borscht, eat whole wheat tortillas, speak tex-mex with a Brooklyn accent; be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints.