

The Borderlands
Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14 and Luke 17:11-19
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I was recently reminded of the legend of Rip Van Winkle- a short story written by Washington Irving and is about a man named Rip who lives in the American Colonies before the revolutionary war. Rip hates conflict and hard work, and he eventually wanders into the Catskills mountains looking for some peace and quiet (specifically from his wife who wants him to work harder). In the mountains he drinks a magical drink that causes him to fall asleep. When Rip wakes up, he learns that he has been asleep for 20 years! And the whole world has changed. He no longer lives in a colony, but now lives in the newly formed United States of America. His children are now adults, and the rules of daily life are all different.

I was thinking about this legend the other day and this idea of waking up to the new world when I was doing my own personal devotions. In my quiet time I realized that I am feeling exhausted, and that exhaustion seems to be from the reality of needing to catch up to this new world we have all found ourselves living in. The Global pandemic wasn't a magical drink that put us all to sleep, but it was a global event that sent us all home, retreating into our homes, hibernating for awhile and disrupting our patterns of life. We had to keep separate from one another and the pandemic has just lasted a very long time.

Recently, like this new fall semester, it has in many ways begun to feel like the world has turned back on; we are getting to do things that we did in the "before times" and it kinda feels like we have to get back out there and return to the world we left behind back in 2020. Calendars are full! Expectations are high! Not only do we want to be fully present in the now, but there is this pressure to make up for lost time.

But there is this also this exhaustion underneath. I told someone the other day that I feel like an old computer that just got turned on after being shut down for awhile; I'm in a state of buffering (the circle of death). It's like I'm having to update to all the new (and old) systems in this new world. I really feel myself on

overload when I'm in a large crowd (going to a Nationals Game). It's like I forgot what that feels like to be around a lot of people.

The truth is (which most of us have realized but are still catching up to) is that there is no going backwards; we cannot just forget about the last 2 and ½ almost three years. Our lives are forever marked by the pandemic, and we will carry those scars with us as we move forward. And also the truth is that it is not over (as much as we would all LOVE for it be). The fact that I'm preaching today because Scott is not able to be here due to having Covid is just another sign that we are not finished with the pandemic. We are still living in the midst of it. We are in a new phase but not able to leave it behind.

Now, more than ever, we are living in the in between. The borderlands, which is the space between the world we knew and the new world we are waking up in. Gloria Anzaldúa, a theologian whose context is the U.S. Mexican border defines the borderlands as

“more than a geographic boundary. The borderlands are “a psychic, social, and cultural terrain that we inhabit, and that inhabits all of us.” a “borderland is a vague and undetermined place”

A lot of the people and groups I work with as the associate Pastor for Christian Formation are folks who exist in this in between space.

Youth returning to school after it being disrupted figuring out what it means to live in this world after a global pandemic, but also living with the anxiety of Global warming and what that means for their future. And the continuous fear/threat of gun violence at school.

Young Adults definitely living in the in between. Young Adults are in the time of life where they are figuring out what it means to be on their own and the world has become a less hospitable place for folks stepping out on their own into adulthood. Finding life giving work, finding a life partner, beginning a family, cultivating community and friends is tough work these days.

The Afghan family our church has helped to resettled over the past couple months is certainly living in the in between; they have lost everything they knew and had to uproot their entire lives and now are having to learn all the ins and outs of life in Northern Virginia. Not only did they lose things, and family members, and friends but they also lost their hopes and dreams and plans for

their future in Afghanistan. All that they had hoped and dreamed for has changed with their displacement.

Yet, The good news is that *Jesus is the ultimate border-crosser*. We are not alone in the borderlands: Jesus is right here with us. In our Gospel reading today, the author of Luke tells us “Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee”. Today’s Gospel Reading takes place in the borderlands between two places that generally were hostile to each other. One commentator notes:

The word Samaria is a red flag, observant Jews did not go anywhere near Samaria or Samaritans. Samaritans were a despised group, culturally inferior, theological and liturgical heretics.

So the very fact that Jesus would travel near Samaria tells us that Jesus has a different view of Samaritans and that Jesus calls us to explore the borderlands and to be with the people who are forced to exist solely in the Borderlands.

And so while Jesus is traveling through the borderlands he encounters 10 people (who keeping their social distance) make themselves known and yell out asking for Jesus to have mercy on them and to heal them.

This group of people have leprosy, which at this time in world history to have leprosy is to be excommunicated from your community and not to ever be welcomed back into traditional society. At the time leprosy was considered to be highly contagious, and so if you have leprosy, you are seen as dangerous to associate with, and also religiously unclean. So not only are you cut off from your community, but also cut off from your faith.

Because of being ostracized, people with leprosy created their own groups and communities. The illness of leprosy would bring together folks who were typically at odds with one another: Jewish people and Samaritans with leprosy would live together. They would organize themselves in order to live and work together for survival. Which is why in our story today Jesus encounters a group of ten people.

Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priest. Jesus instructs them to go to the priest, because it was the priest who would identify them as clean, meaning the priest would determine if they were free to reenter

society. The group follows Jesus' instructions and as they are walking, they realize that they have been healed.

One of the ten, whom we are told is a Samaritan, when realizing that he has been healed, turns back, and returns to Jesus expressing gratitude and falling prostrate at Jesus' feet. Jesus inquires what happens to the other 9? And then tells the Samaritan Get up, your faith has made you well, or translated more accurately, your Faith has saved you.

Traditionally there is a history of interpreting this text and focusing on the gratitude of the 10th man. We all need to be more like the Samaritan who returned grateful for what Jesus has done. And I agree! It is a good practice to notice and give thanks for all the things God has done for us! And I think that is a valid focus, gratitude especially to God is always meaningful. Karl Barth states "What else can we say to what God gives but stammer thanks and praise".

But I also wonder if there is more to the story - the detail of him being a Samaritan seems important. Luke wouldn't give us this detail if we didn't need to know it. The reality is that since this guy is a Samaritan, even though he has been healed of his leprosy, he will still be seen as an outsider at the temple. The rest of the group traveled on because they would be welcomed back into their faith and into their community and families. So even though this guy is healed from his disease he now finds himself alone having lost his friends and community.

So even though he is physically healed he is forced to return to the borderlands because of his identity. But when he returns to the borderlands, he is found and welcomed by Jesus! He falls at Jesus feet expressing gratitude for what Jesus has done.

Jesus responds saying your faith has saved you, and I wonder if Jesus is saying your faith (has saved you) because it has brought you to this new community where you will always be welcomed for this is the new kingdom, the upside down kingdom, the Kingdom of God where enemies become friends, the last is first, and all are welcomed, loved, and made whole.

Nadia Bolz Weber states about this parable: *"when Jesus said your faith has made you well, that's different than saying your faith is the price you pay if you want to be well. The 10 lepers were healed with or without attributing it to God.*

*They were healed with or without seeing it. They were healed with or without an expression of gratitude. Maybe... Faith is optional. Just like gratitude, faith is not an obligation, it's an invitation. It's not the cost, it's the gift." Walking with Jesus and Participating in the Kingdom of God provides an all-encompassing healing that reflects God's vision of justice, wellness, and **belonging for all of humanity.***

In just a few moments we will be hearing from John Day who will be sharing about our Stewardship campaign that begins today. Over next three weeks you will hear that Now, more than ever we are called to participate in God's Kingdom. Yes, we may feel that we are in the borderlands, the in between what was and where we are going, and yes, we are still waking up to discover this new world, but because of **that** Now, More Than Ever it is time to express our faith in God and participate in God's work in the world. And it is the gift of our faith that we get to express.

Now, More than Ever we are called to continue providing ministry to our children and Youth who living in the borderlands and need their church community to see, hear, and love them through this time.

Now, More than Ever we are called to continue providing ministry to Young Adults in our congregation giving them a place to process all that life is throwing their way.

Now, More than Ever we are called to continue our efforts to help those who are refugees in our community. In this past year our congregation has done tremendous efforts to help our Afghan brothers and sisters who have found themselves living in Northern Virginia. We have done coat drives, furnishing drives, and partnered with Lutheran Social Service to help a family of six set up their apartment and also adjust to their new life. With the help of 45+ congregants we helped furnish their entire apartment, while also helping them navigate health care, education, writing résumés, getting their bikes fixed, and answering any questions about the particularities of American life: (for example just this week they asked why do American have to plan ahead so much?) and also just this week because of this congregation's tremendous generosity we purchased a car for the family which will go a long way to help this family achieve a sustainable life. Now, more than ever we are called to continue doing work like this in the world- and meeting Jesus in the Borderlands to makes sure all people know they are welcomed in the Kingdom of God.

It is only because of the generosity of our congregation that we are able to provide the church's programs that are meant to bring people closer to each other in community, and help ease the burdens of our neighbors locally, nationally and internationally. You will all soon be receiving your pledge cards in the mail and you can either make your pledge by filling out the pledge card or returning by going to the church website and clicking the 'Make Your 2023 Pledge Online.

The PCUSA book of Order states that: The Christian life is an offering of one's self to God. In worship the people are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ, are claimed and set free by God, and are led to respond by offering to God their lives, their particular gifts and abilities, and their material goods.

Every Single Gift Represents an important investment in the life of our congregation.

Now, more than ever because The world is in a new place, as we find ourselves in the borderlands our community needs us to proclaim that the kingdom of God is here.

Amen

Let us pray: Gracious, Now More than ever we are in need of your presence as we navigate the borderlands and do the work of your kingdom in this world. Meet us in the borderlands, show us the way, and surprise us with your grace and mercy. Amen