



'Together We Do More: Wrestling with Community Needs'

Lectionary 28 – Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 & 10:45 am, October 9, 2016
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Psalm 111](#); [2 Timothy 2:8-15](#); [Luke 17:11-19](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Note to reader: Pastor Easton is holding up various signs adorned with a single letter: "C" and "W" and "D" and "U" and "L.")

Battling cancer. Recently widowed. Dealing with depression. Or going through a divorce. Unemployed or underemployed and in debt. Lonely and isolated.

Of course, no one really holds up these signs when they're struggling in life. And no one is required to wear these letters emblazoned on the front of their outfit, like Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Yet, when a human being is in these circumstances, they're aware of how they may be viewed by others—sometimes with God-given empathy, but also sometimes with pity (which is not the same as empathy), or with wariness, or judgment. And then sometimes treated with avoidance.

We are years beyond my Grandma Rouse and her generation, which was horrified by a diagnosis of cancer, so much so that she could not bear to name the name. She would whisper, "So-and-so has CA" and shake her head. And keep her distance.

But even if we are years beyond that era, it isn't always easy to share our personal struggle or heartache with the community around us. "Hi, how are you?" "Oh, hi, I'm fine" is the deepest conversation of the heart some of us are able to muster. Even in the community of the Church. Is it the fear of being rejected in some manner? Or the fear we'll be thought of in a different way? Or the fear that we're barely holding it together now, and if we allow ourselves to voice the truth, we won't be able to contain the tide of emotion? Yes.

Now, obviously some folks do just fine keeping their personal lives private, and have little need of community care. But that's not true for the rest of us. Many of us need to know that others care about and will accompany us on the difficult journeys we make.

I held up the letter "L." Were I living back in biblical times, perhaps it would signify I was a leper. That I suffered from a skin ailment (be it actual leprosy, psoriasis, boils, or disfiguring birthmarks). In fact, I would be required to alert people to my presence if they

drew near. Because if I were designated a leper, I would be considered unclean. Not fit to enter the temple for worship. Not fit to enter society for employment or fellowship. I was to be avoided, and it was my job to make sure others avoided me so they would remain ritually pure. Most in the community wouldn't have empathy—though maybe pity, and surely wariness and judgment. I would have to isolate myself for a period of time until a healing occurred, when I could show myself to the priest and be designated "clean." And who knows how long that could take?

That's the milieu we enter in today's Gospel reading. Here are ten lepers providing for one another the only community available. They apparently have heard of this Jesus who has healed others. They approach, keeping their prescribed distance. They ask for mercy. Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priest. Luke says that, on the way, they find themselves healed. But one leper returns, as he realizes from where the healing came. He prostrates himself before Jesus, praises God, gives thanks. Somehow he knows God truly cares about him. He has been shown mercy. (Oh, and did you happen to catch that he was a Samaritan? Do you recall how in previous readings this year we heard about these Samaritans who were outsiders, born on the wrong side of the tracks, not the type you invite into your community? "L" for leper. Add an "S" for Samaritan.) But Jesus, who himself would know rejection and suffering, welcomes the Samaritan and graces him with new life. Turns out the letters, the broken pieces of his life are not barriers to this earthly community shaped by Jesus, or the kingdom created by God.

Today is Healing Sunday. You're invited to offer yourself and your life's broken pieces, and receive a sign of healing and wholeness in the name of God. In this anointing may you know yourself welcomed, wanted, cared for, and accompanied by our God and this community as you journey toward healing.

Rachel Held Evans, in her book *Searching for Sunday*, talks about this anointing and laying on of hands. She suggests such a ritual doesn't provide a cure, but that there is a difference, anyway, between a cure and a healing. She writes, "I believe the church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing. We are called to enter into one another's pain, anoint it as holy, and stick around no matter the outcome." Later on she writes, "...an anointing is an acknowledgment. It's a way to speak to someone who is suffering, and without words or platitudes or empty solutions, say, *this is a big deal, this matters, I'm here.*" (Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, Nelson Books, 2015)

We **are** here for one another. What a gift and responsibility the Church and this community have been given—that we would be here for one another. **AMEN.**

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