



"Together We Do More: Wrestling with Community Needs"

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 pm Saturday, October 8, 2016
8:15 and 11:00 am Sunday, October 9, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

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

After three years I learned something from Tim, our music director, that he and I had something in common. When we were teenagers, we both used to watch TV and occasionally would find ourselves on one of the religious channels looking at a Pentecostal minister named Ernest Angley. Anybody familiar with that person? Let me tell you about Ernest Angley. Ernest Angley is a pastor of a Pentecostal Church in Ohio. He's about five foot one, likes to wear white polyester suits, has a really bad toupee. A lot of his ministry is a healing ministry, and so people would come up during a worship service and they would line up and they would tell him whatever was ailing them, and then he would in good Pentecostal fashion bring healing to them. Now he was made famous by Robin Williams the comedian who basically took as part of his comedy routine and he would pretend that he was a preacher and do that. When I was a kid, I didn't go to church that much so I would often find that on a Sunday morning I would have plenty of time to kind of go through the TV and there would be Ernest Angley, which actually provided a lot more entertainment than the cartoons that happened to be on.

Ernest Angley would begin his preaching with "**H E L L O, Neigh b o r.**" I am serious and it just goes from there. The healing portion was always a lot of fun. They would ask him what it is and then he would say, "*And I believe God is going to heal you whatever that ailment is,*" and then he would invite people who were watching at home, "*if you have any problem, any ailment that's going on, all you have to do is put it right up to the TV screen and then just hold it up, like if you've got tennis elbow, hold it right up to the TV screen and then God's healing power's going to come through the TV and you will be healed, **Ya-ess, all!***" You can see how much fun it was. But when you watched him you would notice that in the church it was completely packed. It was filled with people who were seeking healing and wholeness. There was so much need and you could just imagine that it was probably filled with people that had tried everything else and they felt, let me give this odd preacher a chance. So many needs, yet so few resources.

It's easy for us to become discouraged in such a setting as we look at the enormity of what's going on with our world and even with our local community, and as we seek to meet those needs. We can easily become discouraged. But the answer to that

discouragement is held right in the middle of that word, because what God offers to you and to me as the church **is not discouragement, but courage**. And as we seek to wrestle with community needs it's important for us to understand what those needs are. And so like doctors, we want to be able to diagnose exactly what are the needs and how can we help with those needs. That's part of the discernment process of a church, of seeking to understand, in what way if any can the body of Christ in a certain location be the presence of Christ in a ministry of healing and wholeness. And so we must always look for those opportunities and those places where healing can happen.

Jesus is one who was a wonderful doctor. He could diagnose a problem before it even presented itself so that he could be present to offer God's grace and mercy. And in the gospel we see Jesus on the border, the border between Samaria and Galilee. Now one of the ways of thinking about this it's as if a no-mans-land, or as walking right along the tracks. On one side there's a good neighborhood and on the other side there's a bad neighborhood. In Samaria it's filled with some Samaritans, people who had been left behind when the Israelites were carted off into bondage. So for hundreds of years they had developed their own religious system often at odds with the Jews in the area. Galilee was a mixed area, but primarily Jewish and so they still considered themselves the chosen people. But here on the border we see the mixing of the two people, Samaritans and Galileans. But they come together not because they want to know each other better, they come together with a common illness, leprosy. Now leprosy at the time of Jesus was pretty much any skin disease, not just the modern disease of leprosy that we know. Any skin disease was considered leprosy, and to be cured of leprosy if you could be cured of leprosy and there are some skin diseases that you can naturally receive a healing from. You would have to go to the priest or the rabbi to be officially cleansed of that illness. These lepers that are out in this border region are there because they had been kicked out of their families, they have been kicked out of their communities, their villages in which they lived because now they are considered unclean. And so they find each other and they live together in their own little community of lepers, both Galileans and Samaritans.

Suffering sometimes brings people together and sometimes we live on the borders. There are so many who live on the borders between sickness and health, between suffering and being well, between despair and hope. But notice that is the place where Jesus is. He sees the lepers from a distance they cry out to him, notice they don't say "Jesus, heal us!" Instead they ask for mercy for whatever that may look like. "Have mercy on us, Master." He tells them to go show themselves to the priest, and while on the way they experience a miraculous healing. Jesus gives them what they needed most. The other nine continue on their way, probably going to see the priest as Jesus had instructed. One however decides to turn around and go back to offer praise to God and to give him thanks. He ends up being a Samaritan, one of that hated class. But as he's healed he feels the overwhelming desire to offer up thanksgiving to God. He is the epitome of a broken and marginalized person. But now, instead of going through the process to be officially cleansed he wants to turn around and delay that if only for a moment so that he can give thanks to God and to Jesus. The Samaritan leper has something finally to live for, and with his freedom that God has given him he now wants to offer thanksgiving. He is living a holistic life.

Think about what's happening in this story and what happens in your story. Forgiveness, healing, gratitude, faith, purpose for life. All of these things go together in our lives, all of these things are promised to us in holy baptism. It is there that God gives us hope and the endurance to meet all of the trials that we might face in our life.

Saint Paul understood that as he's writing his letter to Timothy. Even though at this point he is now in chains, he recognizes that God's word offers mercy and grace that it indeed frees him from those chains.

What chains do you have? What need of forgiveness is being left unexpressed? What word of hope do you need to hear today? Jesus knows our struggles and he offers healing mercies for our soul. And so as we come to this day we worship not pretending that all of our chains, all of our sickness, all of our illness doesn't exist, instead we acknowledge them. We lift them up and give them to God and also give thanks to the one who offers his power to heal and to restore. We ask for healing and we offer thanks to God.

Jesus gave his life for this brothers and sisters and he is there to strengthen and to encourage us in our journey wherever it may lead. Remember what he said to the Samaritan leper, "Your faith has made you well." And so too, our faith stirs our souls and offers us healing, and we too offer ministry to a people who are broken and yet healed, and we are called both to live out that kind of life and also to give it to others. That's what you and I can do together as we wrestle with our community's needs. We can offer Jesus himself and give thanks to his presence with his people.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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