

## **A Posture of Remembrance**

November 26, 2023 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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*Texts: Luke 17: 11-19*

Good Morning everyone, I hope you are all doing well in this post-Thanksgiving from all of the thanksgiving meals we have shared in these past few days and thank you for being here.

### **Would you please pray with me:**

Holy one, holy spirit, please guide the meditations that come out of my mouth today. May your presence create a container of love, remembrance, and healing. Hold us in this time together, water the soil in our hearts and may your light nurture our growth. In your name we pray, amen.

### **Introduction**

**Jesus Jesus**, what an experience it is to read about Jesus through the gospels. For this Sunday we have Luke the physician telling us about his experience of Jesus, of course a physician will be writing about healing and the experience of bodies being healed. And I could get all into the exquisite historical and geographical Easter eggs found in Luke, and this passage for today can also get very into the distinctions of the Samaritan and the rest of the lepers. But this Sunday as I prayed before, I want us to use this time to let the soil in our hearts be watered and prepped as we are approaching our advent season. Just as Jesus was in between and on his way to his destination in Luke, so are we on our way to advent on this odd Sunday.

### **How will we be experiencing Jesus's birth this year?**

**Well I do not want to get ahead of time, but I do want to talk about Jesus and the way this story describes him.**

There is a song that I truly love and grounds me when I need space to think about Jesus and my desire to feel connected. The song says is by a band called Housefires and part of it says,

Jesus, what a Savior  
What a brother, what a friend  
Lifter of the lowly  
God You meet me where I am

[Pre-Chorus]  
Your heart, it knows no borders  
Knows no walls  
You're constantly moving  
Towards me

With open arms

[Chorus]

I've never known a love like Yours

The song then goes on as a repetition of these verses and chorus and it really resonated with how Jesus is described in this passage of the ten people who had different diseases that kept them physically and therefore spiritually separated from human touch and human care.

**Now we do not know** what happened to the other nine, nor is it our job to know. In fact, I want to give these other nine the grace that probably they have not been given in the past. Because I cannot help but wonder how hard it was for them to have desires to be close to literally get physically close to someone after so many years of not being able to get close to people.

**But what we do know**- is what Luke gives us as a glimpse of the one who came back. This returner shortened the distance and experienced the mercy and grace found in being able to get close to Jesus. Jesus was the person who this returner related to the one who gave him the ability to feel close to a source of love, humanity, divinity, and care again or for the first time because we do not know if he was born with this condition or it came later in his life.

I wonder if this returner might have said hm I'm healed now, and I want to feel what closeness feels like.

It was as if this person who was now healed wrote this song that I love so much. As he was walking he did not just see his healing, but he felt it.

So, I can imagine this person thinking wait,

Jesus, what a Savior

What a brother, what a friend

Lifter of the lowly (as I was casted out of society)

God You meet me where I am (I was not even supposed to be there but there I was with the other nine)

[Pre-Chorus]

Your heart, it knows no borders (Jesus was at the borderlands between

Knows no walls

You're constantly moving

Towards me

With open arms

The one who returned experienced the other dimension of healing which is the longing to feel human touch after so many years of not being able to receive it.

### **And why am I talking about this distance and closeness?**

Well, because I see as we all see what is happening as we step outside the doors of this beautiful sanctuary. I see the cycle of distance that is intentionally created by this other cycle of hurt people hurting other people. I see the cold shoulder of respectability politics, the cold shoulder of letting differences and fear of those differences separate us from giving care to one another. I see the walls and borders getting taller and wider. And I see just so much there is the need for closeness and healing in our lives.

### **I want to tell you a story about one of my first cultural clashes that I had moving to the U.S**

I remember it was the next day that I arrived at my college campus in Nashville TN and there was a meet and greet with many people. I remember being introduced to someone and as a proud Honduran that I am my first instinct was to go for a hug as I met this person. I remembered being stopped by the distance created by a cold handshake.

That is where I realized oh oh, I crossed a line that I should have not, and I felt really bad because I was not aware of this cultural difference. You see, back in Honduras, no matter who you meet even if it is just the first time, it is social etiquette to say hi to everyone in a room by a hug or even a kiss on the cheek. And it just makes other people feel seen and included in the spaces they come into.

It took me a while to get used to this and I would have to hold myself back. By my second year of living here and it was time to go back for the holidays, I went back and caught myself giving handshakes back home and I realized what a second what! No! I want to give hugs to people! Do note this was pre-pandemic. I know things are a bit different now. But still, that is where I realized maybe this was something I want to change while being in the U.S. and encourage that closeness with one another. So now I do! I created a system where I ask people first can I give you a hug, some say yes others say no and that is okay I respect and honor that.

But I tell this story because it connects with the common theme of distance and closeness that is seen in this verse on Luke 17. This distance at the beginning is transformed by a pulling towards and connection that requires leaps of faith and requires courage to break the walls that tells us we are not worthy of closeness.

**Friends, we need each other, and I will repeat it as many times as needed. Because we do.** We need to shorten the cold distances that have been separating us because of fear, biased upbringings, and this rigidity in posture. Like the other nine, I know it might not be easy because of years and generations of a culture that might not give us many options to get truly close to one another. Do it in your own way, whatever feels best for you.

Now, I know this is not a healing Sunday nor I intend it to be a healing Sunday, but I think that with all of the different things we are holding, we need to check in with ourselves about our internal pain, anxieties, worries, and grief. Because we didn't want to fall into the cycle of "hurt people hurt people"

because that is the least we need right now. It is not selfish to think about these internal things while at the same time holding external grief.

It might be that only when we think, I have never felt a love like this, I have never experienced a love like this. Like the one I feel at church Sunday mornings, or the one that I experience on Friday meals with friends as we share our burdens, like the one I feel when I receive a pastoral care card, like the one I feel when I did not agree completely with a dear friend, but I still choose to draw close and meet them where they are.

Then, our desire to go back and come near and kiss each other's feet. Yeah, I know that sounds uncomfortable and icky, but maybe we need that. Maybe we need that uncomfot that breaks us out of a cycle of rigid agendas and rigid hand shake greetings. Friends, I encourage us to take the walks we need to take to think about the distances that have separated us from sources of love and care. But please please, do come back to that source of love, please do come back to that source of light, come back and get close to the heart of God whose reflection may take so many different ways, shapes, people, and places.

Go back and experience the times, people, places, emotions where you encountered a love and care that

knows no borders  
Knows no walls  
A heart that is constantly moving  
Towards you  
And who will receive you  
**With open arms**

