

Sermon: Leaving the Best Stuff on the Table

Year C, Proper 23

[Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19](#)

Offered October 9, 2016 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

In today's story from Luke, Jesus shows us the difference between "healed" and "well". It's something our animal companions understand completely. When we're under the weather, they settle down and snuggle up with us. And they're back to their normal selves when we get back on our feet. But I think they're responding to us getting well, not being healed.

There's a difference between "healed" and "well." Anyone who has had a serious illness, even if everything turned out fine, even if all the tests have come back negative for years, knows that the shadow of that illness will always hang over you. Anyone who has ever lost a loved one, a parent or a spouse or, God forbid, a child, knows that your life now is different from the time before. You can have made it through all the firsts, first birthday, first Christmas without them, but your life still carries the mark of that loss. You may be healed, but you are not necessarily well.

Anyone who has lost a beloved animal knows how much it aches and how you expect to hear someone say, "it was just a dog, for Pete's sake, just get another one." Yes, they were a dog or cat, but they were also pure love on four paws. And love is always worth grieving for. So in that way too, when you walk in the door and the welcome is not quite the same, you may be healed, but you are not necessarily well.

Those of us with animals in our lives know that they both make us well and heal us. All we have to do is come home. When you think about God's love for you and this world, sometimes thinking about the love we have for our animal companions and the love they have for us is the closest any of us will come in this life. And yet God's love is so much more than anything we can experience or imagine. But the love that flows between us and our creatures is one tiny wisp of the love God is offering us. God wants us to be healed and well, even more than our companions do.

We are all broken and we all need healing. Jesus knew that too. Jesus had healed all ten lepers. It was a gift freely given. They had their lives back and they were welcome to them. Jesus is a man who drank wine and ate good meals, who went to weddings. Jesus celebrated life all the time. He wouldn't begrudge the ten their celebration. He had healed them and they were reveling in the restoration of what their diseases had stolen from them for years. Futures that had been impossible were now possible. They were healed now. If they became well later on, great. If not, at least they were healed. They were off to live the good life.

How far away do you think the other nine were when the Samaritan turned? 100 yards? 200? From here to the river? From here to the baseball field? It can't have been miles or the Samaritan wouldn't have found Jesus again. The Samaritan turns on the road in in order to lay himself in the dust at Jesus' feet. Regardless of how his skin looks, the Samaritan will always carry his time as a leper. He is doubtless grateful for the healing, but there is something more that causes him to turn. There something on the other side of that brokenness, a fresh start, a world where such healing could and did occur. All those broken people following Jesus also give thanks for what is on the other side of brokenness. As he stands up, wiping his nose on his sleeve, the Samaritan is standing in the courtyard of the Kingdom of God.

If Jesus is annoyed that day, it's because the other nine left so much on the table. Sure, they were healed. But they could have been made well. Sure they were received back into their communities. But less than a mile away was the Kingdom of God. They were obedient and it brought them a great reward. With a tiny bit more effort, with simply the will to offer thanks to drive them a few hundred yards, they too would have stood in the courtyard of the Kingdom of God.

Because that is what the Kingdom of God will look like. There will be a bunch of broken people in it, all of them healed, all of them made well. We'll be together, knowing what it is like to be broken, yet grateful that there is something on the other side of brokenness. And we'll thank God. Don't settle for the good life, when you can have the Kingdom. It's just a few hundred yards away. Turn round. Heal. Be well. Thank God. Don't leave the best stuff on the table.