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## MOBILE MESSAGE

LUKE 17:11-19

A SERMON PREACHED IN DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL  
ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2019  
BY THE REV. DR. LUKE A. POWERY

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God and God's people are on the move, mobile, even perhaps more than your cell phone. Just listen to this story that's a part of the travel narrative in the Gospel of Luke. "On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him.... When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean." Notice the movement and action in those words. "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet..." Movement. Action. "Then [Jesus] said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Get up and go. Go and show. On the way. As they went. Movement. Action. Mobile.

Jesus is "on the way." He's on the move. And we're supposed to be, too. The lepers come and the lepers go. Then one returns and then he goes. Gathering and scattering like we do every Sunday. Jesus doesn't want us to remain stagnant, but go and flow in the blowing wind of his Spirit because the Christian life of discipleship is participatory, involvement, activity, movement. Faith is active. Jesus calls us toward a participatory subjectivity as disciples, where we engage, we move, we act, we practice. We don't just talk about trust but we trust. We don't just talk about faith; we have faith. We don't just talk about worship, but we worship. We practice. Spiritual disciplines are all about practice, about action, about doing something to connect with God. God didn't just talk about love but God enacted and performed love in Jesus Christ. God moved into the world for us that we might be moved by his love and know God more deeply.

The academic field of performance studies will teach you that action or doing or practice or performance is an epistemological source, a site of knowing. The same is true in Christianity. A way of coming to know God revealed is through action, movement, and practice. We don't just think the faith, we live it out. Our bodies move in worship to know and love God. We see this as well in the Gospel of Luke on the road to Emmaus. After the resurrection, two disciples are walking, moving, and Jesus, though they don't recognize him, walks with them. He's mobile. Eventually, they sit at a table together, and Jesus "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." Through the action—taking, blessing, breaking, and giving—revelation comes. It's through the doing or practice that revelation can happen. And there is a mobile message for us today.

Through movement, we may discover what we would not know without it. Jesus commands the lepers to do something but he doesn't command faith. He tells them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." We then hear, "As they went, they were made clean." As they went. Not as they believed but as they acted, as they practiced, as they participated in their own healing, they were made clean. As they did their physical therapy, as they took the medications the doctors prescribed, as they changed their diet, as they did the recommended exercises, they were healed. The cleansing, the healing, occurs as they go, not even as they pray. "As they went, they were made clean."

We are participants in our very own healing. There are practices and actions we should do in the process of healing as opposed to just waiting on God. Actually, God is waiting on us to go, to do, to act, to move because our movement, our going, is an act of faith itself. God is mobile, active, so doing is vital for our own healing and the deepening of our spiritual lives. Without the works, the action, faith is dead. Moving in the wind of the Spirit will reveal how we are co-laborers with God in this life, even in relation to our own situations. We may not know when healing will happen or the answer will come but we continue to do what we're supposed to do—move, act, practice, go, no matter how long the road, no matter how long it takes. What we've been asking God for in our lives may occur when we least expect it. We may not know when healing will happen or how, but we still act faithfully. We practice and move in the direction of the grace of God. "As they went, they were made clean."

And on the way, in the movement, in the action, we may discover a grace that we never ever imagined. We may learn something new about God while we practice and move. The lepers went and they were cleansed. “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.” If the movement back to Jesus never happened, we would never know who turned back and praised God. But because of this action, we see something about the all-inclusive love of God.

It is a Samaritan, a religious, ethnic, national, and cultural outcast, a foreigner, the other, the one we despise and think has nothing to offer, who does the will of God and shows us the way of God and the path to Jesus. This faithful eucharistic action is not done by a church council member or a deacon or a church trustee or elder or an organist or choir member or usher. It is a foreigner, the object of disgust, the one farthest away from being socially, religiously, ecclesiastically, and institutionally acceptable, who leads the way and reveals how to practice before God.

“And he was a Samaritan” would make ancient listeners go into cardiac arrest because this would be a shock to their holier-than-thou system. A Samaritan? A migrant? An opioid addict? A cheater? A liar? An illiterate beggar? An unemployed person? A prisoner on death row? Those foreign Samaritans are often more faithful to God than the religious elite. The story of the Good Samaritan lifts up the Samaritan as a model of neighborly love and here in this story, the Samaritan is shown to be a model of Godly love (Ira Driggers).

A Samaritan might have been treated by others like some migrants in our time. But migrants understand what it means to be on the move and this links to a God who is mobile. I received a note a month or so ago from a woman in Green Valley, AZ, whom I do not know. She wrote, “It is with a heavy heart that I write to you from the desert of Arizona to respectfully ask you for intercessory prayers. I live in the desert of Southern Arizona where many thousands of migrants have died trying to cross the border through deadly conditions, and I work with groups of people here who try to save their lives by providing humanitarian aid...we continue to see migrants and refugees suffer and die every day on U.S. soil...Our country and the countries south of our border desperately need prayers...There are more than 1,000 recovered human remains of migrants who were found in Southern Arizona that have not yet been identified. These migrants' families suffer immensely. Enclosed is a cross that I made for the migrant whose identification number is engraved upon it. My goal is to make one for each migrant who has died and who remains unidentified. I do this to solicit prayers for their families and to bring awareness to the human crisis along our border...May this cross be a constant reminder of the needed prayers.”

“And he was a Samaritan.” And he was a migrant. And he turned back. He moved. Moving, migrant Samaritans, those who are foreign, may be the closest to God who's “on the way” to a cross. The Samaritan doesn't just turn back but falls at the feet of Jesus and closes the spatial gap that traditionally existed between Jews and Samaritans. His proximity then leads to his praise and thanksgiving. We don't know if the other healed lepers reached the priests at the temple but as Peter Marty notes, this thankful Samaritan “has found the temple of praise, and it most certainly is not a building!”

The Samaritan's movement to God reveals that who or what is foreign—other—may be the most faithful and reveal to us how to act in the future. A foreigner's faith may be the model Christian way just as when Jesus, after telling the story of the Good Samaritan, says, “Go and do likewise.” If the Samaritan never acted or moved or turned back, we may have never discovered that foreigners can be faithful followers of God too, shocking our numb, and often clannish faith. But this foreigner who moves to God is an example of how to praise. The word ‘orthodoxy’ literally means ‘right praise’ and orthodoxy is demonstrated by a foreigner, not a person at the center of the theological canon or tradition.

The movement or action in this story reveals that Jesus wants to move us toward our healing and move us to such an extent that we might become priests of praise, just like the Samaritan. Jesus wants to move us beyond our ethnic and religious enclaves to see that no one is out of bounds when it comes to God's love and acceptance in Christ—lepers or Samaritans or anyone else on the margins or in deserts. He wants to move us to “get up and go” just like the Samaritan, and ‘get up and go’ just like Mary, and ‘get up and go’ just like the prodigal son, so as it was with them, it can be with us—that something wonderful and life-altering and liberating and redemptive and lavishly loving, awaits us in our future. So ‘get up and go’ because God is already on the move.