

## **“This & That”**

### **Luke 17:11-19**

On the way to Jerusalem

Jesus was going through the region  
between Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him.

Keeping their distance, they called out, saying,  
“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

When he saw them, he said to them,  
“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”  
And as they went, they were made clean.

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.

Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean?  
But the other nine, where are they?”

Was none of them found to return and give praise to God  
except this foreigner?”

Then he said to him,  
“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

## **This & That**

Luke 17:11-19

October 12, 2025

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

Today I'd like to speak with you about "This" and "That." "This" being where we are, "That" being where we'd like to go, and the journey that is required to move us from "This" to "That." As is ever the case, *context* is key. One of the downsides of the theological exercise known as the Sunday Sermon is that, by necessity, it is limited in scope. Owing to the constraints of time and attention, we only ever consider one small slice of the story and, then, extrapolate from there. We use "This" to get to "That." Very often, though, what we can gain by close examination comes at the cost of not noticing, let alone grasping, the larger context. With our gaze fixed firmly upon the tree we miss the forest which stretches out before us.

### **II.**

Today's scripture reading from Luke 17:11-19, the Tale of the 10 Lepers, is of course fascinating in and of itself. Not only does it present us with the opportunity to consider the role of faith in making us well by bringing healing and wholeness to our lives, it also prompts us to consider how gratitude, in and of *itself*, is an act of both faith and faithfulness. It is a story of "This" leading to "That," and how "That" eventually brings us back to "This" again.

That said, Jesus' interaction with the 10 Lepers, is just one small part of a large section set smack dab in the middle of Luke's Gospel which is often called the "Travel Section" or the "Travel Narrative." Spanning 10 of the book's 24 chapters, the Travel Section begins with 9:51: "*When the days drew near for him to be received up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.*"

### **III.**

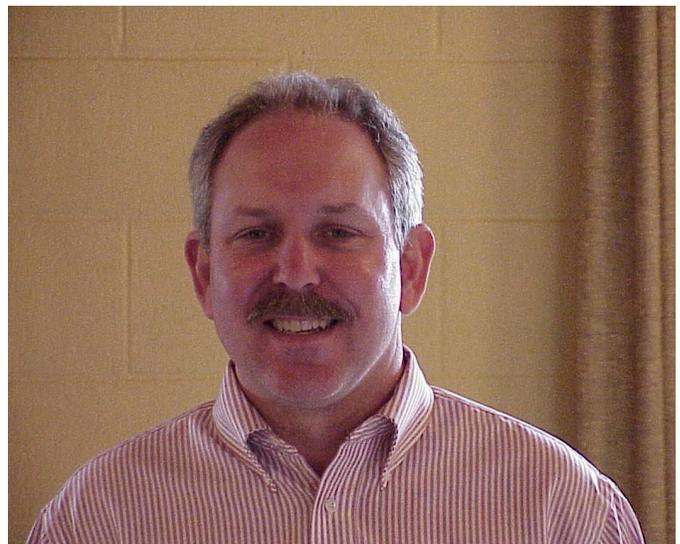
Whereas Mark's Gospel, the earliest, consists basically of two parts: the ministry of Jesus (in Galilee) and the passion of Jesus (in Jerusalem) Luke has added this new section describing the journey of Jesus *from Galilee to Jerusalem*; which is understood to be *just* as important as his ministry and

his passion. And, so, today's sermon text begins with the phrase, "*On the way to Jerusalem...*". For the author of Luke, a great many important and instructive events occur as Jesus travels to the cross. Therefore, Luke would contend, in order to fully understand the cross we must first understand the journey to it. "This" is what happens on the way to "That."

#### IV.

True confession time. *This* is actually the second sermon I wrote this week. A rare and unfortunate occurrence, and one to be avoided at all costs. *That* first sermon, an unflinching but accurate critique of evangelism meant to reimagine a better way to evangelize, was actually pretty darn good. However, events conspired to prompt me to endeavor to illustrate that we must resist the temptation to get so caught up in "That" lest we lose sight of "This." So, today, a few stories.

It has been my great personal delight to see Dale and Colleen Grant in worship of late. While some might have greeted them warmly as newcomers to the church, the fact is much of what we have accomplished here on the Park this past quarter century rests firmly upon their broad shoulders. Colleen taught Church School for decades, directing many a Christmas Pageant in her time. Dale co-chaired the search committee that brought me and Linda to the church. An electrician and jack-of-all-trades (and tools) Dale has spent *countless* hours over many years improving the church building and manse.



Colleen and Dale Grant  
(Circa a long time ago.)

## V.

Though many understand the idea of “church” as the embodiment of stability, tradition, and structure, the truth is the church is at its best when it functions as an open, on-going, and flexible system. A healthy and vital church, by definition, understands and welcomes change as the only path forward. This applies not only to the congregation as a whole, but also to those individuals who comprise the congregation. My goal as the minister is to insure that the church has a sufficient weight and center of gravity (i.e., it matters to people and our community) so as create a pull which serves to provide people with the reasons for them to remain in the church’s orbit across the span of their lifetime. How near or far an orbit, though, is less important as one’s orbit around the church will necessarily and naturally change over the course of people’s lives and owing to different circumstances. *This is good and right and as it should be. That we would expect or demand anything different is a sign that a church is not open to, or welcoming of change.*

## VI.

So it was that I found myself chatting with Dale and Colleen after worship last Sunday. I discovered they are in the process of selling their house in Canton and moving to one they had purchased on Norwood Lake. When they told me they were at the point of moving “the big stuff” I offered to help. Tuesday morning I arrived at the old house to find an *enormous* U-Haul truck (never a good sign) parked on the lawn and back-up to the front door. Dale and I got right to it. In no time at all we loaded an upright freezer, a full a bedroom set, ladders, tools, a mechanic sized tool chest, any number of boxes and assorted other stuff.

We then drove over to Norwood to unload, with some items going to a storage shed and the rest going into the house. We finished just before lunch and as I was sweeping out the back of the truck I said to Dale:

*Well, I can tell you two things for certain. First, we are not as young as we used to be. Second, the last time you and I were in the back of a U-Haul truck together it was 27 years ago and you were helping me move into the manse.*

## VII.

Now for another story. For each of those 27 years I've been in Canton, the week of days leading up Christmas Eve is always the same. I finish delivering gifts to 50 or so Farm Families, families with school-aged children, and those experiencing acute need. In a typical year our church provides anywhere from \$6k to \$8k to folks who aren't asking for help but sure could use it and are extremely thankful to receive it. Once all those cards are delivered to homes and farms all over St. Lawrence County I make pastoral visits to those who are sick, homebound, living in a care facility, or simply do not get out all that much.

Between these two tasks, I will confess, my spirit gets worn pretty thin as I witness first-hand just how hard far too many people have it. Made all the more vivid against the backdrop of the Christmas season. Which is why for a great many years while she was alive, the very last thing I did at the end of that long week leading up to Christmas was to go visit Joyce Bell.

## VIII.

While technically on the "Homebound" list which, therefore, rated her a Christmas visit, the fact is I went to see Joyce less to provide *her* pastoral care and more so the pastor could get some care for his *own* soul. Joyce *never* disappointed. She was kind, supportive, an excellent listener, and incredibly empathetic. I always left her apartment at the high-rise feeling my burdened lightened and my heart softened. As a parishioner, Joyce was forever doing something around the church, usually with her dear friend Shirley Norton. Together they labored the kitchen, sat with each other in worship, helped with the Pot-Lucks, funeral lunches, all of our fundraisers and, without fail, Joyce and Shirley would staff the Candy Table at the annual Fall Bazaar.



Shirley Norton and Joyce Bell  
at the 2008 Fall Bazaar

A proud and private woman, Joyce was widowed young, was no stranger to the hardships and challenges of life, and lived with Parkinson's Disease all the years I knew her. I never once heard her complain about anything, or say a bad word about anyone.

## **IX.**

Joyce also had a wicked funny sense of humor. She was subtle, though, and oh so dry. You had to keep on your toes around her. I remember the first year we had "Come in Costume" Sunday here at the church. Halloween just happened to fall on a Sunday and we all thought, "Well, why not?!? Let's have some fun!" That morning two people came into the sanctuary wearing full monster masks and sat in the rear of the sanctuary. They kept the masks on for the entire service and never uttered a word or spoke to anyone. For the life of us, *no one* could figure out who it was behind all that latex. Finally, after the postlude, off came the masks to reveal Joyce and her companion Bob Ferguson. We all roared.

This morning, many years later, we are so privileged to have baptized Joyce's great-great-grandchildren, Harold and Toby, here in this church which she loved so dearly and to which she gave all she could so that it would still be standing here today to welcome these two children of God into this family of faith here on the Park.

## **X.**

Now, one final story. Once upon a time not so many years ago, but what feels like a life-time, there was "This" church. Its people had big dreams of one day becoming "That" kind of church which wasn't always striving just to survive. They wanted to *thrive*. With things getting dire but not desperate, they called a young minister who was a bit rough around the edges to help "get them back in the game" (as a Search Committee Chair phrased it). With him came his new wife and their 5 year old daughter. Together, they constituted only the second family with a school-aged child in the entire church at that time. For the most part, everyone else had gray hair, blue hair, or no hair. To a person, though, everyone in the congregation was young at heart, hopeful as all get out, determined to work hard and, so, together they set themselves on the journey to becoming "That" church to which they aspired and believed God wished them to one day become. Then, the years they went by mostly unnoticed as they almost always do.



**At son Tucker's Baptism 1999.**



**At grandson Alistair's Baptism 2025.**

## **XI.**

One day, though, it became abundantly clear “This” church which had been striving for so long had, at some point unbeknownst to them, become “That” church which was pretty much thriving (in a relatively speaking, small town kind of way). Which, if the reports are accurate, came as something of a *shock* to our, now, not-so-young-anymore minister such that he found himself preaching the kind of sermon he *never* thought would *ever* be necessary. One which had as its central theme a reminder to himself and his congregation that what allowed “This” church to make the journey to “That” church was nothing less, and nothing other than an *exceptional* sense of gratitude for what God had done for them. A rare, 1 out of 10 kind of generosity which always remembers not to get caught up in having arrived, but to stay focused on what allowed them to accomplish the journey in the first place: to ask for what is needed, to start out with the expectation it will be given, and to return to God with exceptional gratitude once it has been received.

## **XII.**

Returning to this morning's passage from Luke 17, the Tale of the 10 Lepers, it is important to note that Jesus didn't *actually* heal the lepers. He simply instructed them to go see the priest who in that day and culture had the responsibility of declaring a person clean or unclean. Yet, in having the faith to follow Jesus's words, they were (miraculously) made well “*as they went.*”

The real miracle in the story of the 10 Lepers, though, isn't the healing that takes place but the reaction to it. In the same way, the miracle of our church does not consist in "This" church having become "That" church. Instead, the *real* miracle will be how we will now respond and react moving forward into the future to such a miracle of our own making made possible through our willingness to walk the path God has set before us.

### **XIII.**

This morning I have told you a few stories of this church. A church whose history is filled with people who were willing to be *exceptionally* generous in response to what God has done for them. Which, as it turns out, is a rare response. Most people, 9 out of 10, just go on their merry way being about their own business.

Here on the Park, however, we aren't much for *talking* about Jesus as are most churches. Instead, we *listen* along the way to what Jesus is saying to us, now, in these present moments. When we hear Jesus say to us, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well," it is time to stop talking and start doing by loving our neighbors as ourselves, by feeding God's sheep, by taking care of widows and orphans and, as important as anything, by being *exceptionally* grateful for all that God has done, and continues to do, for us and our world. Amen.