

October 9

Luke 17:11-19

“The Circle of Life”

As we experience the ebb and flow of life one of the images our culture has embraced is **“The circle of life.”** Perhaps no more famously than in “The Lion King.” A coming-of-age saga where even the dead father has a role to play.

But another way to think of a circle of life is to imagine **a repetitive process** which helps one in life. Have we not always been told that **diet and exercise** are keys to our physical well-being? *Not* that most of us have followed up with the recommendations for how to develop the habits of a circle of life dependent upon consuming less and being more active.

Today in our text we find a circle of life which we would do well to engage. The *invitation to a life of faith* is always that – an invitation. We drop in on Jesus in today’s text when he is in a **place no self-respecting Rabbi should be**. On the border lands between where one can expect to find respectable Jewish people and many unrespectable Gentiles. This is noted in passing and easily missed – but we should not assume anyone would have been there. Many others – seeking to **avoid the wrong kind of people** and confrontation were not there. And honestly, I’m with them. Why put yourself in that situation? Indeed, Jesus, why would you?

It is important not to miss that this text happens after Jesus has *set his face to go to Jerusalem*. He is focused on getting to that dangerous place. He is pushing on, though it costs him followers who knew how dangerous it was. **He is focused**. And who should appear in the distance but **a band of people who made Gentiles look pretty good: Lepers**. Don’t look at them, they might ask you for help! But they aren’t waiting to be seen – they are **yelling** to make sure they are known, *“Jesus, master, have mercy on us!”*

They express faith, but it is most likely Jesus has never met them before. Strangers in need are clamoring for attention when **Jesus has his mind on other things**. Most of us don’t do well in that situation – even with our families, much less with people who appear out of nowhere.

Jesus has chosen to be in a place in which anything can happen so the lepers have a prayer. The overarching reality for the circle of life in this text is ***the shameless love of God which is present in every life circumstance.***

This is the love the lepers are counting on. The love they hope will be passed along from Jesus to them. The lepers show us the way to journey on the circle of life. Like them, ***we begin by looking for the hand of God in the world as we pursue Jesus who is God among us.*** The lepers show us how its done. When the chips are down, *look for the one who brings God's presence to the situation.*

Once the lepers are there, they get right to the heart of the matter. They don't ask Jesus to engage in an abstract theological discussion – they say – Jesus, help us! This is the next step along the circle of life: ***ask for help.*** We are such proud creatures – and we don't like asking for help. But in the presence of the one who can do more than we could ever ask or imagine – it is the right move.

There is a ***technicality*** here we need to highlight. Lepers were not allowed to be near other people. And the *only way back* to the lives they have lost due to illness is to *go to the priest to be examined and declared, "clean."* Everyone in this story knows that. Jesus tells them, "Go show yourselves to the priest." I have always imagined the ten looking at each other and asking, *"Do I look any different to you? Because you don't look any different to me. Shouldn't we be better before we go to the priest?"*

And then the ten do the unthinkable – against all odds – they do what Jesus tells them to do. *This is the next step in the circle of life.* Doing what Jesus tells us to do – even when it isn't clear that it makes sense. We live as God leads, not because it is obvious and clear – but because ***God is trustworthy.*** The miracle the lepers needed was available – they just had to do what they were told.

In the end, ***only one completed the circle of life*** and came back to say thank-you. And in that "thank-you", Jesus says the man found not only physical healing but also wholeness. *When we acknowledge God's healing and presence in our lives, we find a deeper and wider healing.* It is life giving to ***seek, ask, do and say thank you.*** This is not a secret – but is sure is life changing. Let's follow this circle of life: seek, ask, do, say thank-you.