

Traveling with Jesus sermon series

“Traveling Along the Border”

[Luke 17:11-19](#)

Traveling with Jesus had never been easy in the days of Jesus and even now in our contemporary Christian journey. Travelling with Jesus requires one to sacrifice a lot and be subject to many tough conditions, smiles and joys. It could even mean to be subservient to others in humility. Traveling with Jesus could require a life consistent with God’s divine grace. From a Christological and Theological perspective traveling with Jesus requires a “Kenosis”. Kenosis is interpreted as “emptying oneself”. It is self-emptying of one’s own will and totally dependent on God and God’s divine will. But there is more to that. Traveling with Jesus could involve some socio-political, economic and religious ramifications. It could involve a struggle with the powers that divide. It could even mean losing your life and all that you have and stand for.

I will narrow to what we have in our series: In travelling with Jesus according to our series:

We may find ourselves crossing to the other side of the sea or lake. In Luke 8:22 Jesus said to his disciples “let us go to the other side of the sea...” In articulating this text, pastor Young asked “how often we cross to the other side of the lake to meet people who are different from us. She sensitively described our diversity in this church as a beautiful lake in our midst and everyone lives around it in his or her own affinity, groups or just individually. Crossing to the other side of the sea she continued could be problematic. However, she encouraged us to try and embrace our diversity as this will resonate with an ideal church.

Based on the story of Zacchaeus, a man despised because of the nature of his job and money, pastor Alyson Swanson reminds us that traveling with Jesus requires welcoming those among us, those who might be looked as outsiders and who are left on the margin, those who have been ruled out of bounds, and who might surprise us with their generosity and faith. It could be these people just want to see Jesus (Compare Luke 19:1-10).

Travelling with Jesus could require transgressing against some of the fundamental principles of our faith and religions. It could require working on Sabbath day as pastors do and what Jesus did in the healing of a sick woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17).

In the story of the two sisters, Martha and Mary, pastor young last week reminds us that travelling with Jesus requires doing what matters the most (Luke 10:38-42)

The last segment in this series in traveling with Jesus is “Traveling Along Borders. When we hear about border travelling in recent days we begin to think about what our president stands for in making the wall between the borders of South and the North Americas. Borders are interesting places. They can be places of uncertainties, great tension and divisions. Borders are places where people with different nationalities and backgrounds and perspectives see one another with caution and suspicion. No one can pass through the two territories freely.

During the Sierra Leoneans long years of civil war from 1999 to 2002 I happened to be among people who cross the borders of Sierra Leone to neighboring Guinea and West Africa. Crossing these borders had been places and times of fear and hostility. Our bags were searched, we had to wait for hours and some people were been detained and asked questions about their involvement in the civil war. Some people were killed and property confiscated.

Today we see the border issues between Canada and the United States. Because Canada and USA speak almost the same language and share common religious and political ties, there is not much of a problem compared to that of the South through Mexico. The borders between Mexico and the USA are looked at suspiciously because of the people, the drugs and guns been smuggled through these borders. People coming from those directions of the country may seem different in their cultural orientation than those of the Canadian borders especially through the New England. Many are looked at fearfully, distrustfully and with suspicious.

In today's scripture we see Jesus walking in such a territory. Luke is telling us that this story took place in a racially mixed area. Let us recount the story again.

Jesus had set up to go to Jerusalem and we are not told in the text why but when you read further it could be close to the Passover that we call Palm Sunday. He finds himself between the regions of Samaria and Galilee, which were his frequent boundary space and areas of ministry. As he enters a village ten lepers approached calling out to him for help but keeping their distance because of their physical conditions. They addressed him master, as would Jesus' disciples. Noticing these lepers, Jesus immediately sends them to the priest to confirm their healing. On the way to the priest, they discovered they were physically healed of the leprosy.

After the healing, the focus narrows to one of the lepers who alone returned to say thanks to Jesus. It was during this conversation that we are told that the one who returned in this borderland conversation is a Samaritan, a foreigner and a stranger. Jesus said "were not ten healed... where are the rest of the nine...no one came back to say thanks but only this foreigner or Samaritan? Jesus said to him as the story ends "arise and go, your faith has made you well..." (Luke 17: 11-19).

Let me point out couple of details in this text.

Firstly, I have never been to Palestine, Jerusalem or traveled to the Middle East. However, from my studies of the map of Palestine, Samaria and Galilee border each other. I do not see any big region between them and even if there were any regions between them this Jerusalem route through Samaria and Galilee would be an odd route. We can go back and study the topography of these regions as they were in the days of Jesus if we so desire.

My inclination according to the writer's point of view about the border between Samaria and Galilee could be theological rather than geographical. It could be that instead of Jesus travelling between the borders of Galilee and Samaria, he was travelling between the borders of people who are marginalized and called other names. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to meet some religious and political leaders and his encounter along the way reveals the nature of the kingdom he intends to establish in the future. This encounter hap-

pens in a middle space where one would expect ethnic and religious tensions and rivalries. Jesus shows here that he could travel along these borders of ethnic, social and religious tensions.

Secondly, leprosy in the biblical times was an infectious disease. It was considered incurable and those diagnosed with leprosy were not only banned from society but were considered ritually unclean. In the days of Jesus, to touch a leper defiles someone. Leprosy in the days of Jesus and in the eyes of the religious authorities was a sign of God's disfavor. To the religious authorities, the cure of a leper was as difficult as raising someone from the dead.

To have leprosy was a nemesis and those diagnosed were considered outcast and marginalized. Jesus traveled along borders with these people. He used that geographical space to make a theological point. He demonstrated what his kingdom would be like. He demonstrated that in his kingdom there would be no distinctions between races, social classes, religious and ethnic boundaries, and borderlands.

Furthermore, after the healing, the narrative turns to one person. Jesus had told the lepers to go and show themselves to the priest who inevitably should clear them from the ailment and allow them to re-enter the main stream of the society. In this narrative, we are told that the rest of the lepers after recognizing that they were healed continued to go to the priest to get that clearance. But one said...wait a minute...I need to return and give thanks before I continue the journey to the priest. He came back and prostrated before Jesus and said thanks.

We are told in this narrative that this man was a foreigner, a Samaritan, a stranger, someone the religious people in the days of Jesus would not look forward to as an example. But something happened anyway along this border despite all these division. Jesus touched and said to this foreigner, this stranger, Samaritan, someone different from the traditional religious norms of Jesus' society, "arise and go...your faith has made you clean..."(Luke 17:19).

As I reflect on this text I am reminded of my first encounter with former pastor now pastor emeritus Dick Corson of Campbell UMC. Though ordained in Sierra Leone in the United Methodist connection, I came as a stranger to this Church. When I was introduced to pastor Corson as an ordained pastor from the West African Central conferences, he gave me a bulletin up front to help with the liturgy up here the same day without questions. As a foreigner he listened to me and tried to know who I am and what are my needs. Without further questions and before he retired he helped set the stage for the West African ministry in this congregation. I want to say thanks to him and the entire CUMC membership for walking along borders with people who came and looked like strangers who appeared to be foreigners but were not despised but accepted to be part of the CUMC connection.

This is what Jesus demonstrated along the Borders of Galilee and Samaria. He walked along the borders of those who have been marginalized and cast out. He walked along the borders of those who were called foreigners. He listened to their cries and needs and indeed found ways to help them out. He empathized rather than sympathized with them. He showed them that he feels their needs and pains. He showed them that they are part of God's kingdom and salvation. He travelled with them in every aspect of their needs and pains.

Travelling with Jesus requires walking along borders with people. Travelling along borders with someone indicates that we travel with them in the same direction. It is a journey. In this journey you can listen to them, you can enjoy them, you can share things with them and in this process you are able to understand them better. Traveling along borders with someone is talking the talk and walking the walk with them. This is what Jesus did when he helped the lepers and touched the Samaritan, and demolishing ethnic, social and religious borders and boundaries.

How are we called today as a church to travel along borders with people?

We have the Sierra service Projects,

The jail ministry,

The feeding the Inn vision Ministry

The African initiative

The books, etc you name the rest e are involved in

When you are consistently and constantly traveling or walking with people you are going to understand them better than you ever did. It is a life style that Christians can ever obtain from Jesus. John Wesley and his followers did similar things. After flouting parish boundaries about who had authority to preach in the Anglican Church they were attacked by the Church of England, other institutions and even mobs. But Wesley and his preachers continued to work among the neglected, the needy and the marginalized.

We have people who live on the margin in our midst and in our society. People who are treated as outsiders and who are treated invisibly or unloved because of their color, ascent or skin or because of who they are and how they look or where they are coming from. Jesus clearly tells us in this text that they are all loved and are part of God's kingdom. Jesus calls us to accept all... all means all irrespective of the borderlands.

But again, we might consider the part of ourselves. Those hidden borderlands of ourselves, where we may least want to be seen and most need to be touched by Jesus just as he touched the leper who returned gratitude and thanksgiving for what God has done for him. Christ encouraged us not to be afraid of borderland involvement. I do not think Christ would mind meeting us at places where we find ourselves involved with borderland issues. By recognizing Christ in those areas we may find in our deepest selves a new outpouring of God's grateful love and grace that makes our lives peaceful.

Amen.