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. [This healed leper] 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.”

FRAMEWORKS
We began this service singing “Amazing Grace” — the song of a slave-trader, a human trafficker who changed his ways.¹ Not so long ago, the part of the country where I’m from, the Southeast, went so far as to divide the country along the Mason-Dixon Line, an imaginary border. The country was divided, but unity prevailed. Amazing Grace is what the healing of the nation sounds like. There is hope. We can heal this world.

On Friday, the Governor signed a bill² to ban private prisons, including the so-called detention centers, a euphemism for human-trafficking depots³ for people trying to cross the Mexican border into California, a bill backed by Calvary’s own David Chiu. There is hope. We can heal this world.

[At the top of this sermon], there is pictured an art installation from the border that divides Poland and Ukraine. Two fish, ancient Christian symbols, swimming back and forth freely, oblivious of the imaginary line that separates the people. In today’s gospel lesson, that’s where Jesus goes to heal: the border. Jesus heals at the border.

THE THANKFUL LEPER
The people who raised me taught me to say please and thank you. Having been reared in rural Georgia, please and thank you became the way of life. To this day, even after 20 years, while driving the California freeway, when someone let’s me into their lane, I wave at them to say “thank you.” Most people understand. But, the CA Drivers’ Handbook I read said twenty years ago told me avoid making eye contact or otherwise engaging with drivers on the freeway. They might take it the wrong way. Please!

So, out of ten lepers, only one of them did not read that Handbook and returned to thank Jesus for their healing. The importance of saying a simple thank you and the power of gratitude are very real and healing.

Moreover, the church exists to thank and praise God through our worship and service, because we are grateful to be alive, to be forgiven, to have a future in the kingdom of God.

**The Inevitability of the Kingdom**
The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible chooses to omit some of the Greek in today’s reading: the conjunction “and.” Most of the sentences in today’s reading begin with the conjunction “καί” or “and.” Theo And while on their way to Jerusalem, between Samaria and Galilee… And in a certain village, they met ten lepers… And the lepers shouted, “Eleison! Have mercy on us!” And when Jesus saw them… and, and, and… The free-falling, frenetic urgency. In music we’d call it an accelerando. It’s the feeling I get watching or reading the news. Where are we headed? Why does everything feel so fast, so overwhelming, so out of control? And Jill Duffield writes of this passage:

> Each event unfolds into the next with an unstoppable, domino-like impact on what follows. Until we get to the part in the story where Jesus notes that 10 were healed and only one turned back, praising God and gave thanks to the source of his cleansing, his reconciliation to community, his restoration to relationships. That’s where there is a break in the inevitable chain of events. That’s where there is often a disconnect with us, too, as we fail to stop, praise God and voice our gratitude to the One who brought us back from a living death and gifted us with wholeness. And they were cleansed. And Jesus said get up and, and, and they were healed! And they were whole! “And… and… and” is a reminder that the kingdom of God will come with or without us. I want to have been on the right side when that day comes, when God will have the last word. God’s wholeness, the kingdom, is always imminent and, as Jesus tells the Pharisees in verse 20, We cannot quantify or observe the kingdom of God, but it’s here already, just out of reach, among us and within us.

**False Teachings: The Relevance of Leprosy**

Even though they were created in God’s image, in Jesus’ day, lepers were considered unclean and cursed—hated by God. No one would dare touch them lest they “catch it.” People averted their eyes, wondering what these men did to receive such a miserable, living death, like AIDS victims not so long ago. The highly-visible religious leaders—like the Pharisees or today, televangelists and theocrats—turned their backs and hurled insults.

Perhaps ancient leprosy and modern AIDS have a lot in common because they involve the body. The church has failed to celebrate the body, opting instead for “The DL.” The mistaken teaching goes like this: if we deny our bodies and our God-given yearnings, we will live longer and God will love us more. That is a false teaching—painful and deadly. The great prophet Troy Perry made it plain when he said: “God did not make LGBTQ people in order to have something to sit around and hate.”

The same goes for the lepers in Luke 17. On Facebook or wherever you are, know this: Jesus never denies anyone their full, God-given humanity. Not ever. Never will. In Luke 17:1, Jesus preaches equality. In verse 7 on, Jesus teaches us to say thank you and to offer respite and honor to servant (“slaves”) and even names the field workers. Sadly, as part of being human, we are conditioned to fear "the other." You know. Them!

**Foreigners & Borders**

Jesus not only heals lepers, but verse 18 Jesus identifies the leper who exemplified gratitude as a foreigner, a despised Samaritan. And he does all this, Luke says in verse 11, in the region between Samaria and Galilee. Jesus heals at the border. This miracle healing story is from the border. Think of Galilee as us and Samaria as them. It’s that simple.

**Calvary’s Adult Mission Trip to Tijuana**

4 Interlinear Greek/KJV, accessible online at <https://scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/NTpdf/luk17.pdf>
6 Luke 17:20: Jesus answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among [with] you.”
7 The “down low” — secrecy over honest sexual orientations
8 Call Me Troy, movie, accessible online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cCaj-x3Xo> (October 10, 2019)
9 Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”
12 Nothing is that simple, but this us/them interpretation is a good place to start when reading about Samaria and Samaritans in the Bible.
Last weekend, nine adults representing this congregation walked across the Mexican border into Tijuana. Were we to recontextualize our journey into Bible language, we would say that we walked away from Jerusalem, out of the well-healed Galilee of California — and into what our current Pharisees call the unclean, poor, accursed Samaria of Mexico. Our adult mission team engaged with refugees and asylum-seekers at several locations.

STORIES FROM THE BROKEN BORDER

We were guided throughout Tijuana by three amazing educators from CARECEN Los Angeles. One of them began by sharing this story. I’ll keep her nameless for privacy’s sake.

She had gathered donated shoes in Los Angeles and was headed down to Mexico to hand them out to the migrants who had walked thousands of miles to the US border, seeking safety. We would all need some new shoes has we walked that far!

At the San Ysidro crossing, the Customs and Border Patrol agents (CBT) searched her car and found a trunk full of shoes. They seized her car and its contents and took her into a room for questioning. (When Jesus says follow me, do it, but when the Border Patrol says follow me, start praying.) The CBT fined her in excess of $3000. “Pay us, or we will keep your car.” She offered to turn around and go home to California. She offered them the shoes. So, calling on the non-profit where she works, she managed to gather the money and keep her car. Did you know that Customs and Border Patrol agents are currently instructed to target humanitarians and journalists?14

THE REV. WIMPY BADASS

Even I got pulled into an escalation room when crossing back into the United States. Why? I had my iPhone out at the wrong time. I took a picture that might have included a border agent. Who knows, since I never got to see the picture, now deleted. Instead, I was accused of “recording federal agents.” I didn’t know that is a thing! After intimidating me very sufficiently, they let me walk away without my passport. I called them the next day, they said they’d mail it to me. It’s still not here. So, I consulted a reliable resource, the young woman with the $3000 worth of shoes. She said that I am now probably on a list and that I will have trouble coming home to this country for awhile.

We live in dark times, but here’s some Good News, and there is plenty Good News. How can you help? Step one is “fear not.” Do not let yourself be intimidated. After my fear subsided enough to reflect on the dimly lit questioning room and the agent’s hostilities focused on me, it became clear as day. They’re just playing, and they’re playing around with people’s lives. They cannot believe in what they’re doing. No rational person could. They’re just doing it. They put on a good show, but it’s only a show. The why is for someone else to determine. Don’t be afraid. Now don’t go and do something stupid, but don’t be afraid to behave reasonably, like a citizen of a free democracy. Stand in your truth and sanity. Stand in equality. Stand in faith. At the border, remember, Jesus is there already, healing and challenging injustice. Stand with Jesus, and you will stand tall.

I was so moved by our Tijuana trip that my husband, Lou, and I have decided to sponsor a refugee. We are doing this so that others can learn what’s involved. Hopefully, you’ll be inspired to help, too. I am so “on fire” after the mission trip, organized by our congregation’s sanctuary prophet, Stephanie Gee, it seems like a no-brainer. So, we’ll keep you updated on how it’s going and how you can help. If you want to jump in with us, helping this one asylum seeker, we would appreciate your help. I’m not asking for money. I’m asking for help. Currently, “our” refugee is in ICE detention. When he is released, assuming he makes it through detention, the process begins. I am going to repurpose the frustration I feel over the Border Patrol’s behaviors into healing action. And this makes me feel excited and scared, and most of all, like I’m following Jesus a little closer, and it’s a strange exhilarating freedom, and it’s my own spiritual healing. And healing is the nature of the life we share.

JOIN THE UNDERGROUND HEALING NETWORK

That’s right. The nature of life is healing. When farmers or foresters girdle trees, cutting into their bark in order to kill the tree for whatever reason, other plants send their nutrients through the fungus in the soil to help the trees under attack. The nature of being is healing. This is how God created living things to be: to help those in trouble, to stand up for those under attack, helping and healing. May God give us enough faith to be the healers we are created to be.

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13 https://www.carecen-la.org
https://theintercept.com/2019/05/17/border-smuggling-journalists-activists/?hbid=ls-A0737-wd-P0yD-MQFk-A1Y4wNYQ-44KknW-A6SQ6A0y53K-InOG-5a-Ur
15 My thanks to all who have shown their concern over this matter. Please know that 1) I was not arrested. 2) I was not injured or even touched in any way. 3) One agent indicated that my treatment was excessive. 4) These were federal agents of the USA, not Mexico. 4) I have contacted my representatives in hopes of retrieving my passport and informing me of any “lists” I might have been placed on. 5) I am concerned that my passport, while not in my possession, could be implicated in crime. 6) After witnessing the behavior of the CBP, I do not have a high level of trust in their ethics or practices.
16 I will pray and look for signs and listen for the Spirit’s movement all through this process. So far, I know we’re on the right path.
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in Almighty God,
who guided the people in exile and in exodus,
the God of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon,
the God of foreigners and immigrants.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
a displaced Galilean,
who was born away from his people and his home,
who fled his country with his parents when his life was in danger,
and returning to his own country suffered the oppression
of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power,
who then was persecuted, beaten, and finally tortured,
accused and condemned to death unjustly.

But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead,
not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the eternal immigrant from God’s kingdom among us,
who speaks all languages, lives in all countries,
and reunites all races.

I believe that the church is the secure home
for the foreigner and for all believers who constitute it,
who speak the same language and have the same purpose.
I believe that the communion of the saints begins
when we accept the diversity of the saints.

I believe in the forgiveness of sin, which makes us all equal,
and in reconciliation, which identifies us more
than does race, language, or nationality.
I believe that in the resurrection
God will unite us as one people
in which all are distinct
and all are alike at the same time.

Beyond this world, I believe in life eternal
in which no one will be an immigrant
but all will be citizens of God’s kingdom,
which will never end. Amen.

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