

That great theologian, Meredith Grey, a fictional character on the hit television show, **Grey's Anatomy**, said in one episode, "At some point, you have to make a decision. Boundaries don't keep other people out. They fence you in. Life is messy. That's how we're made. So, you can waste your lives drawing lines. Or you can live your life crossing them. But there are some lines.....that are way too dangerous to cross."

I think there is some truth to what the character of Meredith said. And, while I believe some boundaries are necessary, very needed, and extremely healthy, I also believe that far too often we impose boundaries and build walls that not only fence us and others in, but keep others out. And, quite frankly, too often, as we have seen in our current political climate, we simply draw a line in the sand, create unreasonable boundaries and then refuse to cross those lines to seek common ground.

When we meet up with Jesus today he is continuing his journey to Jerusalem, his journey toward the cross. As he and his disciples continue on that cross bound journey, they move into a border area, the **boundary** between Samaria and Galilee. This boundary was a scary and uncomfortable place. It was a boundary the Jewish people did not like to cross because it took you into that place where those hated and despised

Samaritans lived. And, look who Jesus meets at that border – ten lepers who raise their voices and cry out to Jesus saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” These lepers, knowing they are unclean, keep their distance from Jesus, because that is what the law stipulates. By law, they are not to go near those who do not have leprosy. Enduring the labels of “outcast” and “unclean” they are required to live apart from the rest of society. They are required to live within yet a different kind of boundary, one that keeps them isolated from others. Considered ritually unclean, they were quarantined and treated as objects of revulsion and fear on the part of their neighbors. So, as these ten lepers cry for mercy, not one of them breaks the social conventions that surround their disease as they cry to Jesus from a distance.

The writer of Luke’s gospel tells us Jesus **sees** these lepers and **tells** them to go show themselves to the priests. This was also required by law because the priests would have to inspect the lepers and verify their cleanliness. Only then could they be readmitted to the temple and be freed from their status as unclean. So, they go, and while on their way, they become clean. All ten are healed, but only one comes back to say thanks to Jesus for the healing. This one leper, when he realized he had been

healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude and glorifying God.

So, why did only one leper return to offer thanks? Part of the answer may be found in the identity of this healed man. He alone is identified as a Samaritan. He was considered an outcast, not just because of his disease. He was considered an outcast because he was a foreigner, a disgusting Samaritan. As such, he was twice scorned, twice rejected, and twice removed from community.

It really is interesting that this despised **Samaritan** is the one who stops to say thanks. The writer of Luke's gospel again chooses a Samaritan to make a point. And, as he does, we can pretty much assume his point is not about the proper etiquette for saying thank you. Luke is not giving his first-century listeners a lesson in proper protocol for receiving healing. No. Again and again we find Luke's Jesus teaching in parables and living in ways that disorient his followers with the shock of something new. Again and again Luke's Jesus shows the people that God is close at hand, in your neighbor, in those you **don't** consider neighbors, in an act of compassion and in a touch of healing.

So, why was it the **Samaritan** who came back to thank Jesus? Jesus had not made a formal thank you part of the bargain. He simply told them

to go and show themselves to the priests. Well, we really do not know why the Samaritan is the only one to return. However, just maybe the writer of Luke was more interested in describing the boundaries of God's grace, boundaries that ultimately will expand to include even those the world defines as unclean, immigrant, alien, foreign, and impure. Luke seems to be telling us a story about a very **daring** boundary crossing. A crossing that is daring on the part of **Jesus and also** on the part of the Samaritan.

So, the Samaritan alone returns and, if we look at his posture, we discover that he comes **close** to Jesus and humbly lies down at Jesus' feet. Of the ten who were healed, he **alone** – a despised foreigner - breaches the boundaries and moves from an experience and life of isolation to one of grateful intimacy. While the other nine perform the necessary rituals and practices, he **alone** feels obliged to say thank you. And maybe, just maybe, in his need to say thank you there was a yearning for intimacy with God, a sense that faith cannot simply mean performance of ritual. Faith **requires relationship**. Faith – something that in itself is gift – lures us, grasps us and draws us into relationship with God, a relationship that is healing, intimate, humbling, and yes, even dependent.

I cannot help but wonder if part of the illness we are seeing within today's culture and climate is due to a deep self-centeredness, a viewpoint

that assumes we are right, that assumes we are entitled to what we have. We draw boundary lines, deeply entrenched boundary lines, and we will not cross those lines. We become so preoccupied with our own needs, our own wants, protecting what we have while attempting to justify our unwavering position and perspective, that we maintain our distance from others while holding on to an illusion of absolute independence. In doing so we continue to create divisions among people, cast others aside as unclean, and attempt to make others appear as outcasts.

“Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back.” One turned back from maintaining the protection of distance, turned back from going his or her own way, turned back from self-justification, turned back from the illusion of independence and knelt down at Jesus’ feet, proclaiming ultimate dependence on God. And, in doing so, gave thanks and showed deep gratitude.

Gratitude! The truth is, gratitude is an expression of our need for others, of our need for God. We cannot live within our deeply entrenched boundaries, live at a distance, and become truly healed at the same time. And, the fact of the matter is, all that we have, all that we think we are entitled to, all of our stuff, our health, our position, our job, the list goes on and on, all is gift. One UCC pastor puts it this way, “Like the food that

nourishes our bodies, these things do not grow up independently within us, but are literally foreign, alien to us, gifts from beyond ourselves that lure us into mutual interdependence with **all** others who have been embraced by a God who reached beyond the boundaries that we and the world have established to tell us we belong!”

When we begin to grasp and understand that **all** is gift, we begin to know gratitude. And, it is gratitude that teaches us about the truth of our very lives – the truth that we live in a profoundly interdependent world. The strength and health of our communities, our country and the health of our very selves comes to us as gift when we live in relationship to others.

The healthiest people I know are those whose lives are **not** lived as the self-made man or woman, living within their protective boundaries. The healthiest people I know are those whose very lives express deep gratitude as they have reached across boundaries to enrich and embrace others and **be** embraced by others. The healthiest people I know are those who know that to be truly well requires the embrace of the alien grace of Christ’s daring love, the embrace of the God who crosses **all** boundaries to love us where we are and as we are and make us God’s own.