FROM THE HEART OF THE PASTOR………………………………………

*“Jesus asked, “were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”* Luke 17:17-19

This is a very familiar story in the New Testament providing detailed information of one of the miracles of Jesus. First: given that Samaria and Galilee border each other, there is no "region between" them, and even if there were, it would be an odd route to take toward Jerusalem. It may be that Luke has little grasp of the topography he describes, but I tend to think his point is theological rather than geographical. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to the cross, and the encounters he has along the way reveal something about the nature of the kingdom he will establish there. This encounter happens in a middle space, where one would expect the tension between ethnic and religious differences to be palpable. What God inaugurates through Jesus is made manifest in this "region between."

Second: much that happens in this brief scene is fairly typical. Neither the pattern of healing -- a plea followed by an eminently observable command -- nor the response of worship from the one who returns -- to praise, prostrate, and thank -- is unique. Both are reliable elements in healing stories. God acts in and through the ordinary.

Third: against this backdrop, two details stand out. 1) Given that Jesus has commanded the ten to follow the law, his question seems a tad disingenuous: "Where are the other nine?" To which one might answer, "They are going to show themselves to the priests in accordance with the law...just like you told them to do." Then why does Jesus ask? 2) The one who returns is a Samaritan or, as Jesus describes him, a foreigner; that is, one a first-century Jew would not normally look to as an example. Amid the ordinary, something has changed.

Fourth: Jesus says to the Samaritan, "Your faith has made you well" One might also translate it, as Eugene Peterson does, "your faith has healed and saved you" The Greek work, *sesoken*, from the root *sozo*, can be translated any of these ways: healed, made well, saved. It can also be translated, with the King James Version, "Your faith has made you whole." However, we translate it, one thing is clear: there is more at stake here than mere healing.

**Seeing and Believing**
Taken together, these details orient us to the possibility that Jesus instructs his followers -- then and now -- that faith is not a matter of believing only, but also of seeing. All the lepers were healed; one, however, saw, noticed, let what happened sink in...and it made all the difference.
    \*Because he sees what has happened, the leper recognizes Jesus, his reign and his power.
    \*Because he sees what has happened, the leper has something for which to be thankful, praising God with a loud voice.
    \*Because he sees what has happened, the leper changes direction, veering from his course toward a priest to first return to Jesus.

In this light, this story serves as an invitation to believers then and now, to recognize that what we see makes all the difference. In the face of adversity, do we see danger or opportunity? In the face of human need, do we see demand or gift? In the face of the stranger, do we see potential enemy or friend? At any rate, we do not want to be associated with the nine.