

Sunday, October 9, 2016
Proper 23
Luke 17:11-19
The Rev Fanny Belanger

As I've told some of you,
I've visited a lot of churches while I was on vacations in France.

It's always altogether fun and unsettling to go back to your roots, isn't it?
For me, I enter one of these old French catholic churches, and my first reaction is always to measure how Protestant I have become.

Because I am always startled with the ornamental style: bleeding Christs on the cross,
marble angels so huge they threaten to crash down on the altar

Remaining of saints kept in boxes,

As sign reminding me Jesus is really present in the Tabernacle,

Gilding and painting all over

Sometimes I am so overwhelmed, I feel an urge to run away.

But if I sit and pause to take in the romanticism of it all

I feel touched and

it gets hard for me to leave the place without lighting a candle to the Virgin Mary or to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Maybe you have noticed my stole. This is the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

A wounded heart -

as it was wounded on the cross, according to John's Gospel.

My mother offered this stole to me when I was ordained and so

she bought it in France and it was certainly not designed for an Episcopal Female priest.

The Sacred heart, it's a roman catholic devotion.

So I had my hesitations, and yet I have started wearing the stole – because I love it.

And I love the devotion actually.

The content of this devotion is based on revelations made to a few saints by Jesus,
about his personal feelings.

And in these revelations you meet a Jesus that is not

the powerful Christ rising from the dead

the friendly rabbi teaching the Gospel

but the broken God on the cross. His heart pierced by a sword,

and the secret of his heart revealed.

And this the secret, this what Jesus told these saints:

What hurts me the most is not

the nails, neither the sword

not even the hate of the crowd and of the godless.

What hurts me the most is the ingratitude, the lack of trust, the absence of concern and the indifference

not of the ones who do not know me

But of those who profess to know (and to love) me.

Well, I don't know about all of that
revelations and messages from heaven.

But if I had to investigate the truth of it

as a good Anglican I would wonder

if it's coherent with what the Bible teaches us.

Well, if we look at the Gospel today – we may find it very coherent.

Alright, so now the story takes us to the next level:
Jesus is not talking any more about a disease of the body.
Jesus is talking about a disease of the soul.
And this is what the story tells us:
Sin, the disease of the soul, is like what leprosy does to the body, it's like what depression does the brain:
It's the incapacity to feel and to respond to what we feel.

I know we often figure sin as the bad things we do, think or say.
But, see it looks like for Jesus
the real issue, God's judgment
is not so much about misbehaving.
What makes Jesus indignant about the lepers is not their disease,
but their lack of responsiveness.
Sin is not so much our uncleanness than our immobility, our indifference, our souls being dead.

Only one comes back from the dead, almost literally.
The tenth. This man, he finds the energy to be his own person.
He does not go with the flock, you see,
because he finds it inside of him
to respond, to shout his joy.
Praising God in a loud voice, he prostrated himself at Jesus's feet and he thanked him.

Well, would not we expect all of the lepers to do that?
These nine guys, they are cured from the worst disease and what happens is that they don't even react.
They just go on their way!

And the worst of all is that they may all be very religious people. The nine
– they go to meet the priests.
They do what is expected from them, from their tradition.
Moreover, they do what Jesus tells them to do.
But the tenth man, he finds out that true religion
isn't in the Temple, isn't in the priests, isn't even about
saying Amen to everything Jesus tells him to do.
It's not even about saying Amen to everything Jesus tells him to do.

True religion is about
knowing you're alive and being thankful for it and giving your heart back
to the one who saved you.
To the one who loves you.

We often says this Gospel is about thankfulness, well
this is what thankfulness looks like.
Maybe you were taught thankfulness is about sending thank you cards.

For me, thankfulness was about eating up my soup because they were starving children in Ethiopia
and so my grandmother reminded me I had to be thankful for what I had...
Well according to the Gospel, thankfulness isn't about sucking it up because it could be worse
It's not even about being polite or satisfied enough with our own lot.

Thankfulness is about cracking up with joy

living life to the full
taking chances, doing crazy stuff for the love of God.

I invite you to read this text: "Sin is when life freezes" by Dorothy Solle.

This is really mind blowing.

How often we live to the minimum,

our hearts shrinking with sin, like our members shrink when we are sick with leprosy.

The text speaks about how in our modern, busy and yet comfortable lives we become numb.

We sweep under a thicker and thicker rug everything that disturbs or challenges us

We remain undeveloped rationally, emotionally, socially

We relate only to people of our own class, we have unrecognized racism

Our life are based on competition (we compare ourselves to one another)

We are depoliticized

We lose our capacity to relatedness

Everything in the world becomes shadowy, unimportant (because too distant)

We think we cannot patch an electric wire (We cannot do anything by ourselves)

We ignore our own strengths and capabilities

We lack self-confidence and hope

We think there is nothing we can do for the needs of the needy.

Everyday so often we live like robots.

Going to show ourselves to the priests, getting things done,

marking our calendars, checking our mails and checking our phones,

buying, spending, wasting.

But our lives remain poor, because we don't rejoice in God's grace.

We ignore the return of the birds and the rise of the moon, says Dorothy.

We drive in closed air conditioned cars

We laugh in front of shows programmed to make us laugh.

Our souls are like broken pianos only able to play a single note:

Our indifference, our anger or our sadness or even

a blind optimism. We' re numb.

Leprosy of sin makes us lose sight of the delicate complexity of our souls

of our feelings, and the many creatives way we can respond to this life that has been given to us.

Yes indeed it must really break Jesus's heart,

it must break his heart that we cannot more often live a life that gives praise to God

a life

layered and fascinating like a good novel,

rich and balanced like a great wine,

open to God's surprises and God's mystery.

So may we like Naaman, like the tenth leper, the Samaritan,

be more often walking like foreigners in our own religion

in our relationship with others and with God,

may we enter our lives like when we enter a church we have never visited before

trusting a new revelation from God

trusting a new revelation on what our life could look like

trusting God will give us a healing that will exceed all our expectations. Amen.