

Luke 17: 11-19

One of the cured lepers returned to give glory to God. Jesus said arise and go your way; your faith has made you whole.

This certainly sounds like pretty straightforward gospel be grateful! I'll reflect on it in the light of a new book our Thursday discussion group is reading. In essence the author suggests all gospels must be embraced as metaphor.

What is the image that might emerge from this story about Jesus? Butler Bass tells us that the stories are open-ended and invite us to struggle with their meaning, to wonder, and to see the world from different angles. Old Testament scholar Amy Jill-Levine, tells us that stories challenge us to look into **the hidden aspects of our own values**. They bring to the surface unasked questions and reveal answers we have always known but refused to acknowledge. I suggest that this story has something to tell us about wholeness.

Nine of the lepers were healed and perhaps in their excitement to move on and reconnect with life they overlooked the integration of grief and illness. Escape was their desire. It was the one who came back perhaps re-memembering the diseased state that initiated some form of on-going relationship with God that would bring health and wholeness.

So what are we called to do with this moralistic teaching about the value of gratitude? We are invited into a review our relationship with God. I am going to make reference to a book most of you haven't read so I hope you will forgive me for that. Diana Butler Bass examines theological teaching from her earliest Sunday School days through adolescence and university. She concludes that it is relationship with Jesus that has been her bolt hold. So I wonder where the core of your belief is. Is it growing and changing? Clearly

this week, we've all had cause to reflect on our relationship with Christian teaching with huge media interest generated by the resignation of the Essendon Board President. I even saw Rev Dorothea Lee on ABC breakfast television discussing the Anglican connection to the City on the hill. In Dorothy's estimation, most Anglicans would disagree with the teaching attributed to that church.

Why is it important to know what we believe as Anglicans? I seem to have asked you to consider what you believe quite often. What do we stand for? The question is relevant as your representatives on Parish Council have recently decided where to direct its mission giving. Attitudes and belief are relevant as we decide if we should spend money to boost our Facebook profile; our on-line presence in order to promote activities. How do we present our community to the world beyond our doors? We need to know who we are and what we hope to achieve before we can make decisions about how we use our resources.

So where does our knowledge and understanding of our faith come from? Is it Sunday School days and an hour a week spent in church? Butler Bass gives a great example of how poorly formed ideas impact people's capacity to learn and grow in faith.

She explores what people believe when they say the "Word was God" as in the prologue to John's gospel we buy into a horrible theological mix-up based on English translation of "Word." The Greek term John used was *logos* which means ground or speech or expectation. It doesn't mean word as part of speech. The Greek term for that sort of word is *Lexis*. In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God and the *logos* was God. The *Logos* was the ground of divine being, the breath of God, the presence of the holy in and through all things.¹ Do you see the difference?

¹ Butler-Bass, D. *Freeing Jesus* p 54

An understanding based in our ordinary world knowledge is sorely lacking². **We need the expansive imaginal experience that can draw each of us into multiple meanings and significance for it may be there that God has something new and surprising for us to learn.**

If we take such an example to heart, rather than fixed information to be taken into logical thinking, we are invited into personal dreaming and wonder. What is the breath of God doing in your being in your daily experience? How might you surrender to it through dance, music, painting, cooking, poetry, gardening? This is open-ended relationship that grows with gratitude.

Butler Bass invites readers to reflect on personal faith formation. She reflects on her Confirmation as a Methodist. Do you remember Confirmation? I certainly do. She recalls “When I stood before my congregation and was asked “Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments? It was not framed as invitation. It sounded a bit like a threat, but it was intended as a vow. The authorities wanted an answer not an RSVP. “I do” was my solemn response. I had no idea what it meant or where such a promise would lead me. **What I wanted to say was that I would keep showing up. And keep learning from the Word.** ³

How blessed was I to read this explanation. You see, I think many of us haven’t spent the days, weeks months and years reviewing how Jesus has and is shaping us. Today’s gospel is just such an invitation to wholeness through exploration and re-membering bringing back to self, attitudes and behaviour that we have denied or nagging questions we have ignored. Perhaps its just easier to be told what to believe and how to act?

² Ibid

³ Ibid

How should we react to Jesus the remarkable teacher who taught radical interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish practice that actually inspired people to leave their homes and follow him.⁴

He invited them into a way of life based on a vision of **a wildly gifting God** who created everything, who turns authority upside down, who shatters the pretenses of power, who proclaims the kingdom of the heart and who brings the poor, the outcast, the forgotten and the mourning to a table set with an endless feast. He taught this by demonstrating the rule of love.⁵

He spoke in proverbs and parables to confound the learned and gather the curious. How much of this sounds like what you expect from your church or your faith-experience?

So what of the one leper who turned back to praise God? He was one who reached towards possibility! The absolute joy of this book that the Thursday morning folk will share is honesty and wonder. Do join us if your interest has been peaked.

Reference

Butler Bass, D. *Freeing Jesus* Harper Collins 2021 USA

⁴ Op Cit p61

⁵ Ibid p61