

Sermon 22.11.20

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Psalm 111: 1-4

Praise God!

I will thank the Holy One with all my heart -  
in talking with the earnest,  
And whenever people gather.

Your acts are vast beyond measure;  
all who delight in them marvel at their power.

Majesty and splendor pour forth from creation;  
your generosity endures for all time.

You crafted your wonders to last forever;  
You overflow with compassion and grace.

Luke 17: 11-19

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. And he 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.'

**SERMON** (to access slides, click [HERE](#))

My friends, we have been on an inner and outer journey with stories these past months. Following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, winding our way through challenging terrain.

Through much of this gospel, Luke's gospel, the writer follows the gospel of Mark's outline - a gospel that was written earlier and known by this writer, likely used as a template - both gospels follow Jesus' public ministry, beginning in Galilee, where Jesus calls disciples, preaches and teaches, performs miracles, and comes into conflict with the religious leaders (Mark 1-10; Luke 3-9). Jesus then heads to Jerusalem - where death and new life await him.

The most significant structural difference between Mark and Luke is what is variously called Luke's "Travel Narrative," or "Journey to Jerusalem," (Luke 9:51-19:27). In Mark's gospel, we first learn Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem in one chapter, (Mark 10:32) and he arrives half a chapter later. In Luke, by contrast, Jesus heads toward Jerusalem in Luke 9:51, but doesn't arrive for ten chapters (Luke 19:28)! ***Jesus does not head straight for Jerusalem, but instead moves around from place to place.***<sup>1</sup>

**(MAP ON SCREEN)**

He stops and connects with the people around him - healing and telling stories. It's as if he's leaving markers - like cairns - as he moves from place to place. As he moves from town to town, he's teaching his disciples and the many he meets, about this love that is for all - especially the lost and the outsider.

In a story we rarely read - not today, but at the very beginning of this journey to Jerusalem, Jesus sends messengers ahead to make ready - and when they enter a Samaritan village and are not welcomed, James and John, his closest followers, ask off-handedly "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9: 51-55)

James and John are ready to annihilate a whole village! A place that doesn't fit their understanding of who this kingdom of God is for, or what it's about. Jesus rebukes his disciples and moves on to another village.

**(IMAGE 2)**

Yes, Jesus has lots of cairn building to do. A lot of signposts to set up along the way. He tells stories, parables, over and over to shake up his listeners - asking them to see in different ways - to give up their tightly held beliefs and ways of seeing the world, and make space for something new.

These ten chapters of the Travel Narrative contain many of Jesus' most famous parables, several that we've looked at in recent months - the Rich Fool, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Persistent Widow, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. They also contain many memorable stories, including today's story of the healing of ten men with leprosy, and last week's - the story of Zacchaeus.

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<sup>1</sup> [Commentary on Luke](#)

Last week we heard Jesus tell Zacc and the crowd: “ the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10–11).

***This section of Luke’s gospel, the travel narrative, has sometimes been called “the Gospel for the Outcast,” since so many of the stories and parables relate to God’s love for the lost and the outsider.***

Throughout this journey with Jesus, we’ve been hearing about signposts of God found in our ordinary lives (Ndunge today)...

(IMAGE 3)

We’ve been building a cairn as a reminder to ourselves and one another that Christ holds the stories of our lives - our hopes and dreams, our stumbles and failures, our backtracking and sometimes, getting really lost. Christ holds our lives, and welcomes us to journey with him.

In our scripture today, though lumped together as 10 who came seeking Jesus - really, each leper was on his own journey. Each one stepped out in faith, an outcast. And when Jesus told them ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests’, they headed toward the temple of their faith - likely the Samaritan headed toward Mt. Gerizim, the holy place and site of the temple and priests for the Samaritans, while the others headed toward the temple in Jerusalem. The healing happened along the way, not before the journey began.

I wonder, did the Samaritan leper, the foreigner, now clean from his death sentence, build a marker - a cairn, in the way Abraham and others marked sacred places, those thin places where they experienced God’s presence?

What are the markers in our lives? Or should I ask *where* are the markers in our lives? How do we leave signs of God’s presence in the journeys of our lives?

*What, where, how* do we make visible - and give thanks for - the ways we experience God on this journey of life?

Cairns - signposts - are built not of one solid rock, but of many - broken pieces of stone that are placed together in such a way that they show the way. Broken things used to build something new.

Today we will begin the dismantling of the cairn. You will have an opportunity to take one of these stones with you - a symbol of the work for you, for us, to continue to do. Outer work, an outer sign, that is informed by the inner work of seeking, of asking questions.

How might you take what you know of Jesus, of the one who welcomes us all - outcasts, sinners, rich leaders and hurting women - and become a living signpost in the world today?

I want to tell you a story that I found not long ago - somehow it resonated with me - it's about outcasts, or those who were at one point in their history marginalized, sharing hope and love - in very tangible ways with one another. Perhaps a signpost in today's world.

In southeastern Washington state, (IMAGE MAP) tucked off a dusty desert road on the Yakama Reservation, past fields of spindly hop plants and apple orchards, there's a farm that for nearly a century has been an unlikely bridge between two American communities. A signpost of their resilience and mutual generosity.<sup>2</sup>

(IMAGE FARM)

In the face of discrimination and hate, the Inabas, a Japanese-American family, and the Yakama Nation forged a bond through farming that has blessed them all.

When Lon Inaba, 67, third generation of his family to manage the farm — was ready to retire and sell the farm that had long been his family's treasure, several potentially lucrative options came to mind. (IMAGE INABA)

But then Mr. Inaba remembered the many acts of kindness that Yakama tribal members had shown his family. Acts that allowed his family to begin over, again and again, starting when his grandfather arrived in Wapato in the early 1900s, coming from Japan in search of a better life.

By the time Lou's grandfather, Shukichi Inaba, arrived in Wapato in 1907, it had already been about half a century since the federal government pressured the Yakama tribe to cede by treaty more than 10 million acres of their ancestral homelands.

The elder Mr. Inaba, together with his brother, took on the arduous task of clearing sagebrush on a plot leased from the Yakama reservation. They soon found success farming hay, potatoes and wheat.

By the 1930s, less than 30 years later, (IMAGE) as many as 1,200 Japanese people, many of them American citizens, had settled nearby, building a thriving community around their Buddhist and Methodist churches and a Japanese language school.

But their success stirred resentment. Many of the Japanese farmers, including the Inabas, saw their lives upended by the 1921 land-lease ban - when the Washington State Legislature banned "aliens" — including people of Japanese ancestry — from leasing land. Again, it was a Yakama tribal member who told the family not to worry, that they could farm a portion of his land.

Then, in early 1942, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an Executive Order which sent more than 100,000 American citizens and other residents of Japanese ancestry to incarceration camps. (IMAGE CAMP) Given the label #33120, the Inaba family spent more than two years at the Heart Mountain incarceration camp in Wyoming.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/us/yakama-nation-japanese-farm.html?referringSource=articleShare>

The Inabas were among the few Japanese American families who returned to Wapato after they were released. They found their farm had been taken over; their new car had fallen into disrepair. (IMAGE) Signs reading “no Japs wanted” dotted the Wapato area.

And yet...and yet, with the help of several Yakama tribal members and white neighbors, the Inaba family started over.

Once again, another Yakama man carved out a parcel so that the Inaba family could rebuild their farm.

“If it wasn’t for the Indian nation, we would never have been able to be here,” recalled Mr. Inaba’s mother - Shiz Inaba, now 93.

Several years ago now, the Yakama Nation expressed interest in buying the farm — now a 1,600-acre company that supplies top grocery chains (IMAGE)— seeing this purchase as an opportunity to improve the community’s access to healthy produce.

Mr. Inaba calculated that selling to the tribe would mean that his family would likely receive millions of dollars less. But it felt right.

“Different individual tribal members were very kind to our family and to the Japanese community over the years,” Mr. Inaba said, thinking, ‘Hey, this could be a way to repay them.’”

After several years of negotiations, last year the tribe purchased the farm.

Virgil Lewis, then vice-chairman of the Yakama Nation tribal council, said that the parallel struggles of the Japanese American community and the Yakama Nation had contributed to a sense of historical solidarity. One in need helping another along the way.

On a recent autumn afternoon, nearly a year since the sale, banda music blared on the farm as workers from Mexico and Guatemala packed pumpkins into cardboard crates to ship in time for the Halloween season. A Haitian man zipped around on a forklift. Several young members of the Yakama Nation, brought on to learn how to run the farm from the Inabas, flitted between the packing area and the office.

(IMAGE)

In the center of the packing floor sat a stack of boxes emblazoned with a new name: Yakama Nation Farms.

Since acquiring the farm, the tribe has been experimenting with different ways of distributing produce to the community, including through donations and subscription boxes. (IMAGE)

It is part of the tribe’s broader vision to give people more control of their food supply and nutrition. There have been hurdles, for sure, such as developing farming expertise within the Yakama Nation, whose members generally have more experience in ranching and fishing.

But both the Yakama and the Inabas are determined to make this project a success.

(IMAGE STONES)

Lon Inaba said he would work for two more years to help with the transition, and was prepared to stay longer if needed.

"I really think we kind of owe it to them," Mr. Inaba said. "We've had it tough for 75 years. They've had it tough for 600 years."

We have big stories - like the mutual generosity between Japanese-Americans and the Yakama Nation - but that story is made up of many acts, big ones, little ones, acts of reaching out and supporting the one in need. Acts, like one stone piled on another across decades, that grow into something that shows the way. The way of love.

Really though, the journey begins in here (heart/body). Jesus journey is not one simply of finding the right path, or road to follow. Jesus summons us to an inner transformation. A journey that asks us to go within, to listen for the movement and guidance of the Spirit. Then...then we can step out, setting up our stones, our guides, one inner attitude, one outer act, at a time. The journey is both inner and outer. We cannot have one without the other.

Next week we begin the season of Advent - what an invitation to the inner journey through darkness and waiting, to new life. Consider, my friends, how you are beckoned on this journey of life.

What is the inner journey asking of you, and in response to that, how are you invited to be in this world?