

How are we made well? What is the connection between faith and well-being? These are the questions Kate was asking with when preparing a sermon on Luke 17:11-19. The message is calling "Turning Back" and it was delivered Sunday, October 13.

"Get up and go your way; your faith has made you well." As we just heard, Jesus said this to the one former leper who had just been cleansed of his disease. But, isn't it interesting, "being **made well**" seems to have nothing to do with the leprosy at all. He along with nine others was made clean, and then the others went their way. This one came back and praised God. He prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus and gave thanks. Then, and only then, does Jesus tell him to get up, his faith has made him well.

So, if the being made well does not refer to the cure from leprosy, what does it refer to? It seems to be about something deeper than what was going on with his skin. The key is in the line "then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, **turned back**, praising God with a loud voice." Biblical commentator Margit Ernst-Habib writes: "In Luke, as in the New Testament in general, 'turning around' [or 'turning back'] as a description to the believer's reaction to Jesus' work is certainly no accidental action, but filled with deep theological meaning. It describes a movement of a **whole person**...a redirection of orientation toward God." (*Feasting on the Word*) Being made well has to do with turning back to God in thanksgiving which is the ultimate sign of faith.

Now, the inference here is that prior to this the one who **turned back** to Jesus was not turned toward God in a stance of gratitude. And perhaps we would ask why should he be? He has a skin disease for heaven's sake, one that banished him from polite human society. He has to live on the outskirts of town lest he contaminate anyone. He is seen as unclean. **Why** would he be thankful?

I believe the answer has something to do with what we let define us. Are we defined by current conditions in our lives, which may include illness, anxiety, fear or happiness, good health, and success? Or are we defined by our relationship with the one eternal God? No matter our circumstances, **nothing** can change that we are beloved daughters and sons of a God who

esteems us, who sees deeper than our skin, beyond our bones and stature, to our precious souls. When it is the soul that defines us, the core of who we are created and beloved by God, the temporary conditions, however painful, or however wonderful, teach us compassion, patience, gentleness, and, yes, gratitude. It is the soul that knows and senses God's presence through it all.

I was thinking about this at 5 a.m. on Wednesday morning, the day after all the furniture and boxes were moved to the new parsonage. If I stood in the middle of my disordered kitchen and let the current conditions define me, I would spend the day in chaos and frustration. But, when I stepped out on to the back deck and looked up at the brilliant stars, I could feel the chaos dissolve; I sensed my smallness, the beauty of the universe, the Spirit's breath in the cool breeze. Defining myself in relation to the glorious creation, I could face the current conditions of the house with patience, even with joy.

Of course, a disordered kitchen is not the same as a terminal disease. But I have always looked with wonder at people in pain, even people in deep grief, who embrace each day as it comes and bless each person who comes to them. And now, I think I understand. It comes from their awareness that the life of the soul, the person they are in God, is secure, does not fall or fail, is safe. I am reminded of 100 year old Idres Lothrop who a few days before she died told me "He is my Savior and I love him!" She did not experience herself primarily as a dying woman, but as a beloved child of a doting God. She lived her life in gratitude. Her faith essentially kept her well.

Whether you are 100 or 1 or anywhere in between, overall well-being, the kind that shines in our eyes and sounds in our laughter, depends upon this **grateful orientation toward God**. One of the most prolific Christian writers of modern times, C.S. Lewis, once remarked: "I

noticed how the humblest and at the same time most balanced minds praised most: while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least. Praise almost seems to be **inner health made visible.**” Now, while I might not want to label folks as easily as Lewis, I do get his point. Those who praise and give thanks often to God **and** to one another have a very different vibration, a different kind of space around them, than do those who are constantly dissatisfied. That space does not feel healthy or welcoming. Something always feels out of balance. In the presence of grateful people, it is much easier to breathe, and when **we** ourselves are thankful, there is a well-being that floods our bodies and washes over those in our midst.

“Get up and go your way, your faith has made you well.” Out of the mouth of Jesus, we have powerful testimony about the nature of faith. Faith, in every circumstance, has us **turning back toward God** in praise. Faith is a posture of deep gratitude whatever comes our way and it is this that makes us well. Being well is the ability to find joy in the relationship that has no end, no matter the temporal circumstances.

The nature of our physical lives here on earth is indisputably temporary. We, all of us, are going to die (even though when I was little, I thought God and I made a deal!). But if we spend time nurturing our relationship with our Creator, it is possible to experience a profound sense of connectedness with the source of all life. Here we find that a part of us never dies. We are each a thread on great web of being that is incomplete without us, our energy, our love, our being. Our souls are deeply embedded in the great soul that is God. Going through our days grounded in this knowing, we walk the path of well-being – praise, awe, and thanksgiving. Amen.

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“You Are My Savior”

tune: SLANE

Words written by Rev. Kate Winters
on the occasion of Idres Lothrop’s 100th birthday

You are my Savior, my dear one, my all,

Ever so near me whenever I call.

You hold my life in the palm of your hand.

Savior, my dear one, your dear child I am.

Life is the great gift you’ve given to me.

Friendship your blessing for eternity.

Faith has been mine since the day of my birth,

Savior, my dear one, my great love on earth.

My heart will sing for the rest of my days,

Shining with starlight and brimming with praise.

Comforter, healer, you’ve been all to me,

Savior, my dear one, I live ever in thee.