

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-first Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – October 9, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 17: 11-19

For Reflection

"When Brian told me he grew up in New Mexico, I told him I thought it is cool that people from other countries play football. He corrected me on my geography and agreed to sit down with me anyway."

~ Terry Bradshaw, American Athlete (b.1948)

Geography



Jesus moved around a lot. The Gospels are full of short sentences about where Jesus was or was headed. This week's lectionary text is no exception. As I read about ten lepers in some village Jesus was passing through – and thinking briefly about how two elementary school children in Riverside County were diagnosed with Hansen's Disease in September of this year (<http://www.livescience.com/56057-leprosy-california.html>) – which seemed rather surreal when I heard it on the radio – I kept coming back to the first sentence of the story.

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through
the region between Samaria and Galilee.

The thing is – there IS no region between Samaria and Galilee – like the region between North and South Korea known as the demilitarized zone. Galilee abuts Samaria on the northern border – and one would travel through Samaria proper to reach Judea and Jerusalem in the south. Most scholars are kind about this and say, "The geographical reference is vague here." But the Jesus Seminar which tends to be blunt says that the guy who wrote this was unfamiliar with the territory – basically had no clue which way to depict Jesus walking to get from north to south. But he DID know that it was important to mention that the healed leper was a Samaritan – which leads us to try to understand better what it meant to be from Samaria in the first century c.e.

According to the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites captured the region known as Samaria from the Canaanites and assigned it to the Tribe of Joseph. After the death of King Solomon (c. 931 BC), the northern tribes, including those of Samaria, separated from the southern tribes and established the separate Kingdom of Israel...

In 726–722 BC, the new king of Assyria, Shalmaneser V, invaded Canaan and besieged the city of Samaria. After an assault of three years, the city fell and much of its population was taken into captivity and deported....

[The Assyrian Empire fell about 100 years later.]

In 6 AD the region became part of the Roman province of Judaea, after the death of king Herod the Great.

Over time, the region has been controlled by numerous different civilizations, including Israelites, Babylonians, the classical Persian Empire, Ancient Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, and Ottoman Turks...

The Samaritans are adherents of Samaritanism, an Abrahamic religion closely related to Judaism. Based on the Samaritan Torah, **Samaritans claim their worship is the true religion of the ancient Israelites prior to the Babylonian exile**, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaria#Ancient>

So you can imagine the animosity felt by purists in both Israel and Judea. Samaria basically rests like pungent cheese in a hostile sandwich (for lack of a better metaphor). ☺

So the fact that the one healed leper out of ten who came back to say thank you was a Samaritan – was testimony to the power of Jesus to heal even the most mis-guided and corrupted of those who claimed to be Jewish. It's all about geography here – it matters where you are from.

So I'm still thinking about this imaginary region "between Samaria and Galilee" – and realizing that before the Gulf War in Kuwait in 1990 – I was woefully ignorant of where any "middle-eastern" nation was. And it took the wars after 9/11/2001 to school me in geography. And now the refugee crisis crossing borders in the European Union – and Brexit – are forcing me to pay attention to the geography of the Mediterranean and European nations. Geography class must be heck to teach these days – especially to fourth graders like my son who has a hard time figuring out if Florida is another state or another country.

Hurricane Matthew has made it abundantly clear that national and state borders have no meaning when it comes to weather and climate change. Before the storm 2 million people along our Eastern coast were ordered to evacuate to higher ground – mind-boggling numbers.

And if we look at global numbers of migrants living outside their country of origin, according to the UN:

In 2015, **244 million people, or 3.3 per cent of the world's population**, lived outside their country of origin. The majority of migrants cross borders in search of better economic and social opportunities. Others are forced to flee crises – the current mass movement of refugees and displaced persons has given rise to xenophobia and calls for tightening borders. Internal migration within countries is also on the rise...almost half of all migrants are women, and most are of reproductive age. They have specific needs and human rights concerns....

Although migration between continents receives significant attention, most international migrants move over smaller distances. North America and Oceania (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oceania>) draw most international migrants from other regions, but **the majority of migrants in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean still reside in the region where they were born.**

People also move to escape. The international community is currently experiencing a flood of migrants from countries in crisis, **with the number of forcibly displaced persons in the world now higher than it has been at any time since World War II.** According to the UN Refugee Agency, **by the end of 2014, 59.5 million individuals had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations.** This trend continued, and may have even intensified, in 2015, with exceptionally large

numbers of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, a majority of them from Syria and other conflict-affected places.

Internal migration – movement within countries – is also increasing, as people respond to inequitable distributions of resources, services and opportunities, or to flee violence, natural disaster or the increasing number of extreme weather events. The movement of people from rural to urban areas has contributed to the explosive growth of cities around the globe.

<http://www.unfpa.org/migration>

And here's something I didn't know before googling all this information:

India has the largest diaspora in the world, followed by Mexico and Russia.

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/01/244-million-international-migrants-living-abroad-worldwide-new-un-statistics-reveal/>

And until I read *THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS* by Isabel Wilkerson I had NO understanding of the great migrations of millions of African-Americans out of the South into specific geographical areas of this country during and following the Jim Crow era.

Geography. Geography and migration. Geography and evacuation. Geography and refuge. Geography and exile. Geography and Jesus. Geography and spiritual journey. Geography and politics.

Geography matters. Just because it is or isn't in the news doesn't mean we shouldn't pay attention. Historical and present day borders and migration trajectories matter. Laws that criminalize or naturalize the movements of populations matter. Building or tearing down walls are policies that matter. Climate policies matter big time.

And unless we start building starships to other planets pronto – we **HAVE** to lift our eyes off our own navels and see our situation in the context of **GLOBAL GEOGRAPHY** – educate ourselves about this planet and act according to **GEOGRAPHICAL REALITIES**.

Geography is a Spiritual issue.
Let's get the Maps out and start packing.
The Storms are coming.

Luke 17:11-19

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."