

ASC Sermon October 13, 2013 G. G. West

I recently read a story about a rural vicar in England whose bicycle went missing. The man relied exclusively on his bicycle to get around his little parish and he knew that bicycles did not just disappear, so he figured that someone in the parish—most likely a young jokester was responsible.

The vicar had a plan. He decided to preach on the 10 commandments on Sunday, and when he got to ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ he would pause and look carefully around the congregation, to see if he might see a very red face and therefore identify the thief.

All went well in the preparation and Sunday came and he started working his way through the commandments, planning a crescendo at the 8th

commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ The only problem was that when he reached the 7th commandment, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery,’ he remembered where he left his bike.

Memory is great when it comes to us but all too often we do not have a clear recollection of events. And this includes me.

Several months ago, at a post traumatic group meeting at Coatesville, the subject of prayer and church came up. I believe that the psychologist leader of the group asked whether we had prayed when we were in combat situations. As I recall we said we did. Now, I am not saying that this was the case for everyone. Was there a bargain made? It did not appear so. Was there any statement of thanks. It did not appear so. In fact, many of us came home and did not have any church affiliation or much of a spiritual life at all.

I do not think that asking for God's help was or ever is wrong but what follows is where there is a disconnect. Is there an obligation to make a response?

All of us at times bargain with God and we make statements or promises which we do not seem to keep. It would seem that our memory fails us. This kind of memory loss is pretty normal. For the soldier, the forgetting begins when one is no longer in the combat situation.

For most of us this happens when a loved one has died. The funeral marks the beginning of a process of forgetting someone. I know that we might say that we will never forget but we do and that process begins even on the way home from the cemetery. The truth is that the person who has died becomes less a part of our lives from the very

day we bury him or her. Oh yes, we remember them but sometimes in a very different way because they are no longer a part of our ongoing lives. We may want to remember but we cannot. And as time goes on, our memories may even become fictionalized to some degree.

So here in Luke, we are confronted with the ten lepers. Maybe they wanted to remember but they did not or could not.

I doubt that any of us have confronted a person with leprosy because it is a disease which has been largely eliminated from our world especially since a vaccine was found in 1940. We now call the disease by the more modern name of Hansen's disease and there are only about 3 million people suffering from the disease worldwide. We also know today that the disease is just not that

contagious as once thought. It spreads in areas where there is poor nutrition and because lepers were isolated to fend for themselves poor nutrition always seemed to prevail. Lepers were cut off from society and family. Their lives were horrible. They were condemned to lives of poverty and they would die a very lonely death.

The ten lepers here kept their distance as required of them when they asked Jesus for his mercy and healing. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priest who is the authority who would declare them to be 'clean' --probably the same priest who declared them to be 'unclean.'

We must assume that the lepers marching into the village to the priest would have been an unwelcome sight because being cured from leprosy was not a common event. And it is noted

that they did exactly what Jesus had told them to do—go to the priest. We also do not know exactly when the lepers realized that they were cured but one did return to Jesus to give thanks for his cure and it would appear that Jesus did expect all to seek Him out and give thanks and praise.

Why did the nine not give thanks for their good fortune? A foreigner who did not realize that Charlie Brown was a comic character and not a Charles Brown had a cynical list of reasons why they failed to go back to Jesus:

One waited to see if the cure was real.

One waited to see if it would last.

One said he would see Jesus later.

One decided that he had never had leprosy.

One said he would have gotten well

anyway.

One gave the glory to the priests.

One said, “Oh well, Jesus didn’t really do anything.

One said, “Just any rabbi could have done it.”

One said, “I was already much improved.”

My guess is that these guys just forgot to go back for the same reason vicar forgot where his bike was; the soldiers and marines got away from the war; and we forget as we leave a funeral. We all have in a sense moved forward with our lives and the images in the rear view mirror are fading and become less clear.

I believe that many of us do forget people, events, and promises because we are so busy living. I do believe that perhaps 90% of the time I am not as thankful for the good fortune that I have and for all the good things that God has done for me. I

am not thankful 90% for my family, my health such as it is, or even my life in Christ. Too often—perhaps 90% of the time I get up every morning thinking about what I must do rather than giving thanks for what I have and what has been done for me.

As followers of Christ we always want to get on with life, and we should move forward with joy, but we must remember to look back with thanksgiving. It is this blessing and thanksgiving that the nine lepers missed. It is not that they or perhaps we have done anything wrong but perhaps they and we do not see our good fortune and do not act on our blessing.

We are reminded over and over in our community to give thanks as we go through our worship together. We come here as a family to worship

and praise God. We come here to give thanks to God for what He has done for us and we are challenged when we leave here to be thankful outside of these walls. In the remembering of our blessings and giving thanks for them we become more whole with a second blessing.

Yes, our world is filled with both blessings and challenges. Do we focus more on the challenges than the blessings? Do we spend much of our time playing the blame game to the exclusion of being thankful for our blessings?

Will we be embarrassed when we get to heaven and our eyes are opened to all the miracles that God did for us—most of which we are not aware. Will we come to realize that we rationalized away many of the miracles...like the nine lepers who were healed?

Let us strive to be more like the tenth leper who received much more than a cure from his leprosy. He went out in the world to proclaim the blessings that he received. Amen.