

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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In today's gospel, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he entered a village on the border between Samaria and Galilee. That short phrase—"on the border"—is easy to miss, but it says a lot. This story didn't happen in a temple or a city or a seat of power; it happened in-between. Jesus walked through the mixed space where people from both sides lived uneasily. It was a place where maps blurred and identities were questioned—a place that often became a battleground of fear.

As he entered the village, ten people cried out for mercy. They had a skin disease—they called to Jesus from a distance because the purity laws demanded it. But Jesus didn't heal them right there. Instead, he told them to go and show themselves to the priests—the very people who had excluded them. And on the way, they were healed, but only one came back. The text is clear: the one—the grateful one—was a Samaritan. A foreigner. The one everyone else would have written off.

That borderland feels familiar today. In recent weeks, Chicago has been filled with fear and confusion. Reports of ICE raids have left both citizens and non-citizens terrified. One mother walking with her child on the streets of Logan Square was tear gassed as she ran for safety. Governors have sent National Guard troops from other states to "reinforce" the border. Meanwhile, the government shutdown threatens the pay and jobs of workers who keep public life running. In all of this, I can't help but hear echoes of that borderland between Galilee and Samaria. Once again, people are being told who is

clean and who is unclean, who belongs and who should keep their distance. Families are hiding, communities are being torn apart, and some leaders justify it all in the name of order or purity. Yet, even here, God's mercy finds us.

Jesus walked right into that kind of world. He didn't avoid the border—he walked through it. He didn't uphold the rules of separation—he overturned them. And the one who ended up closest to him was not the insider but the outsider. To that foreigner, Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well." The word "well" in Greek, *sozo*, means more than healed—it means saved, made whole, restored. Ten were cleansed, but only one was made whole—and it was the one who crossed the boundaries others built.

So too, the Samaritan's act of thanks wasn't politeness—it was resistance. It was worship. He broke the expectation that healing meant returning to the temple. Instead, he turned back to Jesus, defying geography and religious hierarchy to proclaim the mercy he had experienced. That was faith in action—belief made visible through courageous gratitude. The Samaritan was more than healed; he was saved. His thanksgiving became a witness that reshaped how the community saw who belonged and who bore God's image.

Last week, the bishops of our church wrote a powerful letter to the ELCA. They said, "Our faith compels us to stand where Jesus stands—with and for those whom society often seeks to exclude, erase, or diminish." They named this as a moment where immigrants and refugees are being vilified, people of color still bear the weight of systemic racism, and transgender people are being targeted by laws that deny their dignity. They reminded us that these aren't political abstractions—they are wounds to the body of Christ. Their

words remind us that we are not alone in this witness—God’s people across the church are standing together.

They went on to say, “Christian Nationalism confuses the gospel with political power. The kingdom of God is not a nation, not a culture, not an ideology—it’s God’s reign of love, justice, and mercy for all people.” And that’s the border Jesus walks—the one between God’s reign and human fear. For Jesus, faith isn’t a membership card or a passport. It’s not about where you were born or which side of a wall you stand on. Faith is trust in mercy—a trust that leads to action, gratitude, and boundary-breaking love.

That’s where the church belongs, too. Not at the center of power, blessing the status quo, but on the border—walking with those who cry out for mercy, standing with those who risk everything just to be seen and safe. Our bishops called that stance “insisting on love.” They wrote, “Love insists on the dignity of every human being. Love insists that the church must reflect God’s diverse, life-giving community. Love insists that we stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are targeted or harmed.” And when we grow weary, the Spirit lifts us again with the promise that love always wins.

All of that got me thinking about how our congregation sponsored a refugee not that long ago. This family came to Chicago with little more than suitcases. They had fled violence and uncertainty, hoping for safety. When they arrived, members of our church were waiting at the airport with smiles, and a meal was ready for them at their new apartment. None of us asked for papers or proof—we simply said, “Welcome.” We helped them settle in, access resources, and find bikes so they could explore their new neighborhood. At first, we saw ourselves as the ones offering mercy and support, but each visit to their home always started with them providing a feast of food and laughter.

We arrived thinking we were the hosts, but they welcomed us instead. In those moments, love crossed a border, and wholeness happened—not because the world was perfect, but because God’s mercy refused to keep its distance.

Moments like these remind us that God’s new creation is already breaking in. It is to believe that the fullness of salvation—the wholeness Jesus offered—comes through relationship, not regulation. So when we host, feed, accompany, advocate, and speak out—not only are we helping others, but we are healed as well.

Today’s reading reminds us that gratitude becomes holy defiance. In a world of fear, gratitude says, “I see what God is doing, and I refuse to let fear dictate who deserves mercy.” Every act of thanks is an act of trust that God’s love cannot be walled off, deported, or shut down. For, in baptism, we were marked with the cross of Christ forever—a mark that spans all lines humans draw. The cross reminds us that we follow a God who chose the borderlands, who lifted the foreigner, and who made the excluded the bearer of wholeness.

So, as we move into the rest of the service, hear again Jesus’s words to the Samaritan: “Get up and go. Your faith has made you well.” May we rise and go—trusting that faith still moves us beyond borders, that gratitude still turns fear into courage, and that God’s love is still making the world whole. Amen.