

New Testament: Luke 17: 11 - 19  
Sermon Text: Luke 10: 29 - 37

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

To be someone who is deplorable you are the subject of censure, reproach, or disapproval; you are very bad or wretched. The first example we have in our scripture reading today of Jesus encountering someone who could be counted as deplorable in his context was his interaction with ten lepers. Leprosy is a bacterial disease that spreads through airborne respiratory droplets. Today we understand that you cover your cough or sneeze, or even wear a facial mask, and wash your hands thoroughly and you can greatly reduce the spread of diseases, like leprosy, that spread through the air. We understand today how to prevent mass infection without isolating or demonizing individual people. In Jesus' time they only knew and understood that the best way to prevent mass infection was to isolate people; to ostracize them from the rest of society, effectively making them deplorable. Still 2,023 years later we fear what we do not understand and, for many of us anyways, it is "easier", I say lazier, to turn people into modern day deplorables instead of taking the time and effort to understand them.

When we affix labels to people it gives us permission to stop viewing them as a fellow human being. They become the label we affix as opposed to a human being created in God's image. And so for these ten lepers they ceased being people worthy of care and affection, and simply became those wretched lepers with whom we do not associate. They were censured, reproached, and disapproved of. Not simply because they had a disease that could spread and make others sick, but because they could make other people ceremonially unclean. When you live in a religious theocratic society, to fall out of favor in a ritualistic way with what is expected by your superiors makes you a law breaker. Then to be someone who could cause *others* to break the law just by being present with them makes you doubly dangerous. Not only could you make me sick, but you could make me a lawbreaker! Best to stay far, far away from you! When this mentality sets in, those persons become the object of reproach and disapproval. And they are assigned a label, leper, so that we can feel justified in treating them as less than human.

Immigrant *people* are labeled drug dealers and rapists. Undocumented *people* are labeled illegal aliens. Black *people* are labeled criminals or welfare queens or the "n" word. Latino *people* are labeled as gang members or thugs. Muslim *people* are terrorists. How do we fix this? Let me call your attention to what Jesus did. Jesus saw them. Listen!

Listen! Verse 12, he was met by ten lepers. His physical eyes registered them right then and there. There's no way Jesus doesn't comprehend with his eyes and ears that there are ten lepers before him begging him for mercy. There is no way we do not comprehend with our eyes and ears that there are immigrants, aliens, blacks, Latinos, and "terrorists" begging us for mercy! The difference between Jesus and so many of us today? Jesus saw them. He saw past the label of leper and saw their humanity because that's what God does. And we as disciples are called to do the same. We are called to see past the labels of drug dealers and rapists, illegal aliens, criminals, thugs, and "terrorists" and to see immigrant *people*, undocumented *people*, black *people*, Latino *people* and Muslim *people*. We are called to stop being afraid. Jesus wasn't afraid. In this encounter he did not touch the diseased people to heal them, his words were sufficient. But in Luke 5, when he first cleanses a leprous person, he does touch him. We need to stop being afraid of what we do not understand and start learning new things. That is our calling in Christ.

In our second scripture reading we saw Jesus flip the script on the lawyer desiring to justify himself by asking, "who is my neighbor?" We struggle to treat one another as fellow human beings, don't we? We have a particular mindset or perspective or way of doing things, and we find it so difficult to humble ourselves enough to listen to those with whom we have arguments or disagreements. Instead of agreeing to disagree, like we used to, we deem one another deplorable; wretched, very bad, and we disapprove of them. It was, unfortunately, no different in Jesus' time which gives me pause yet again to make the point, we've not come nearly as far as we think we've come. The Jews and Samaritans viewed one *another* as deplorable. Their lifestyles were completely different and each thought that the other was wrong. In fact right before the parable of the Good Samaritan, at the end of chapter 9, we see Jesus request permission to enter a Samaritan village. He asked them to make preparations for him but they did not receive him because he had set his face to go towards Jerusalem. Remember, hospitality was still an incredibly important part of Semitic culture and this Samaritan village failed to practice hospitality because of refusal to receive him. And the Jewish disciples' response to these heathen Samaritans? James and John ask Jesus whether or not they should call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritan village! Are you starting to understand the disdain these folks had for one another? The Jews treated Samaritans as unclean and second class. They saw Samaritans as foreigners, or mixed race, and saw their faith as defective and their lives as impure. The Samaritans, for their part, thought that the Jews were not true Jews, nor Israelites, because when they'd been taken captive and exiled to Babylon, the Jewish faith became distorted during their exile there. So the Samaritans were making the claim that the remnant had brought back a tainted religion. The prophets had been talking about God restoring a faithful remnant for generations and the Samaritans had the gaul, the audacity, the chutzpah, to call this remnant tainted? And then Jesus makes one of

these Samaritans the hero of his story. Everyone, Pharisees, Sadducees, disciples must have been completely embarrassed and bewildered and anger was likely hiding those two feelings.

Do you have a sense of just how diametrically opposed Jews and Samaritans were? And yet, because God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sees people for the people they are and not the labels we assign one another, Jesus seeks to lift up the deplorable, lowly Samaritans by making them the hero of his parable. A modern day equivalent for whom religious people deem lowly and God wants to lift up? The LGBTQ community. Those Christians who hate that community of people do so because they live a completely different lifestyle which they deem defective or impure. They are wretched and very bad; they are deplorable. They are censured and reproached because they are going to indoctrinate our poor, sweet, vulnerable children. They are going to convert us all to their heathen ways! And for the LGBTQ community's part, they see those Christians as bigots. As hypocrites, not true disciples, because they speak about God's love out of one side of their mouth, and spew condemnation, hate and vitriol for them out of the other side of their mouth. You know, fact is, and I'm 95% sure on this, each and every one of you already knows someone personally who is a part of the LGBTQ community. You already have a relationship with that person. If you do not know that you know that person, it is because they are afraid to tell you. A whole community of people who are afraid of Christians. Tell me, how are we supposed to fulfill Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit when a whole community of people are afraid of us? And again, if this isn't personally a problem for you, if you're tempted to say, "Eddie, I don't feel that way so it's not my problem," it is your problem, because it is a problem for the Church at large and the Church is one body. We are all connected and the hand cannot say to the foot I have no need of you.

We really have to consider this Lenten season, as we prepare to receive the gifts of forgiveness and grace, whether or not we have become the deplorable, lowly people that God seeks to lift up, ourselves. God be praised that if we discern and confess that that is the case, as I have sought to show these past several weeks God is ready, willing and able to lift us lowly religious folks up as well. Amen.