

So ... Let me take you back to my **Generation X** childhood –

when I would come **home from school**, make a **snack**, and sit in **front of the TV** to watch something called: *The ABC After-School Special*.

If you grew up in the 1970s and 80s, you remember these afternoon shows.

The grainy film.

The bad **PERMS!**

And those **very serious lessons** –

ALWAYS delivered with a **dramatic synthesizer soundtrack**.

The episodes had titles like:

The Day My Kid Went Punk.

Are You Embarrassed by Your Parents?

And this is a good one: **"Tattle: When to Tell ON a Friend."**

THE **moral** of the stories was often the same:
Do the right thing, everything will work out –
and (this is **SO** important) make sure, in the
end, you say, *thank you*.

At first glance, **today's Gospel** reads like one
of those **episodes**.

Ten lepers are healed.

One returns.

Moral of the story: BE the thankful one.

Cue the credits. Roll that groovy music.

YES! Gratitude matters.

Giving thanks to God for our blessings is part
of what we're doing this morning. In fact, the
word Eucharist literally translates as
"Thanksgiving."

But today's Gospel reading **isn't just** an *After-School Special* about good manners.

It's one of the most theologically loaded passages in all of Luke. At its very heart, it asks: What does FAITH look like?

Jesus is still on the long, dusty road to Jerusalem. We find him walking on **the margins**, in the **borderland** between Samaria and Galilee - WHERE he encounters this **band of lepers**.

Because of the serious rashes and all of sores on their skin, society sees these men as **unclean**.

So they have been cut off.

From their **community**.

From **touch**. They live in exile.

Keeping their distance ... these 10 strangers **call out to Jesus**. They beg for mercy.

Jesus simply says: "Go. Go and show yourselves to the priests."

Yes see, That's what the law required –
To be declared clean, you had to go through this
big ritual production, where you got the **good
housekeeping stamp of approval** before you could
return to your friends and family.

So these 10 lepers, they obey Jesus: they start
walking to the Temple. And along the way ... a
miracle happens. They're healed.

NINE of them – looking down at their new skin --
are like, this is awesome. In fact, after they
go to the Temple to be inspected, they probably
head to **the Farmhouse at the Crossroads** and
celebrate with a big order of calamari and
steaks.

But ONE – this guy I imagine being played by a young Rob Lowe on an After School Special –

One turns around.

He goes back to Jesus and Falls at his feet.

And he says to Jesus: *thank you*.

Jesus' reply? "Your faith has made you well."

YES, the nine others were healed.

But ... there's a difference between being *cured* and to be *made spiritually whole*.

ALSO, THE One who turned back to give thanks was a Samaritan.

And that's not a small detail.

In Jesus' time, Samaritans were seen as heretics.

They didn't worship in the **right place**,
or in the **right way**,
or believe all **the right things**.

Jews saw Samaritans as completely **BEYOND** the
reach of **holiness**.

So, **this healed Samaritan** was BOTH a leper! and
a foreigner.

And yet, it's this outsider AMONG outsiders --
the last person to think he could **receive God's**
mercy —

he is the one who truly knows what grace feels
like.

His "faith" was the act of **turning back** toward
the source of LOVE and recognizing it.

HE saw clearly, with gratitude, that our Creator
moves and heals -- EVEN in the places we thought
were **godforsaken**.

In Jeremiah's letter to the **homesick exiles in
Babylon**, he tells them this morning:

"Build houses.

Plant gardens.

Seek the welfare of the city."

It's a call to solidarity. Because even in
exile, the prophet says, we must embrace our
shared fate fully and faithfully - to be part of
a RESISTENCE of hope.

AND reading these ancient words this week, I
kept thinking about how words like "foreigner"
and "alien" are used in OUR TIME. How they're
constantly uttered to dehumanize.

AND YOU better believe that I was thinking about
our immigrant neighbors and friends –

Our neighbors – many of whom are poor, uprooted
and in exile. Migrants who feel scapegoated and
even hunted in the neighborhoods where they have
built homes, planted gardens and worked hard.

My Bible tells me that God has a thing for the
people this world casts aside.

And refugees and immigrant families are **the most
vulnerable of the vulnerable in our country
right now.**

Even if you – amid the rhetoric, headlines and
your lived experiences -- even if you're trying
to figure out where to stand in **the complex
terrain of immigration**, I pray that you will do
this:

Remember our **shared humanity**. AND ... I PRAY

Remember those times in your life, **when you have felt like a foreigner**.

When you felt displaced because of loss. Or a betrayal. Or illness.

Because of Failure. Addiction. Discrimination.
Or even when the church hurt you, making you feel like you don't belong.

In our humanness, we ALL have times of **deep hurt or vulnerability**, when we feel like a stranger in a strange land, when we cry for mercy.

If we forget those times,
we forget our own story.

Because -- in our family and faith story -- we, too, come from wanderers.

From exiles.

Jesus definitely knows what it means to be a
foreigner.

On the **cross!** God in the flesh entered **our**
exile,
our **loneliness,**
our **wounds.**

But here's the Good News:

If you're feeling like an outsider today,
if there are places where you feel displaced and
wandering -

please know that those are the places where the
Divine goes FIRST.

When OUR hearts break, **God's heart breaks.**

SO Have faith.

AND What does FAITH look like?

Well, I can tell you what faith is NOT. **Faith** is not a privilege of citizenship or paperwork.

Faith does not attempt to inflict pain and fear.

FAITH is being tough enough to be kind.

It's realizing that ALL of our earthly lives are a journey somewhere between Samaria and Galilee,

between **illness and health**,

between **exile and return**.

Faith is knowing that The Bible isn't just an After-School Special with moral lessons.

It's a **love story. A love story** without borders

— about a God who desperately wants to be

intimate with you,

even when this world tells you you're unworthy,

even when you think you're too far gone.

God's HEALING LOVE is bigger than anything in
its way.

And ... Eventually, When exile becomes home,

When light overcomes the darkness,

Faith is **receiving** that grace and saying, "Thank
you."

Even when it's just turning around - in surprise
and wonder -- and speaking gently into the
autumn night, saying: "Thank you."

Knowing that IT is heard. And that IT **has made**
you well.

Amen.