

**Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC**  
October 9, 2016

**“Get Up, Glow, and Go”**

**“Get up and go on your way;  
your faith has made you well.”**  
Luke 17:19

**PRELUDE**

It is always a joy, an honor, when we have occasion to celebrate the sacrament of baptism. It is a thrill to have Kathryn Sarah Kiep in our midst for her christening. And to sing as we sung:

**“Little sister, welcome!  
Earth is yours to live in;  
arms of love protect you,  
little sister, welcome!”**

**Little sister, welcome!  
We, the church of Jesus,  
We will help your growing,  
little sister, welcome!**

These are rather bold, profound affirmations,  
are they not?  
Earth is yours? Arms protect?  
We - the church of Jesus -  
will help your growing?

The words are those of Fred Pratt Green,  
a British Methodist pastor and poet;  
The Rev. Green saw a need for  
fresh translations of faith in church hymns,  
a need for verse suited for the challenges  
and change occurring in the 20th century;  
and he set about to fill it.

By my count there are 12 hymns  
in our New Century Hymnal  
with Green's verse, which is really quite large,  
exceeded only by a select few (the likes of  
Ruth Duck and Ralph Vaughn Williams)

Curiously, most of Green's work as a hymn writer  
occurred in retirement from parish ministry. He  
was quite prolific in his writing over a span  
of almost two decades - 1969 to 1988 -  
through his seventh and into the eighth  
decade of life.

It was Green, as I recall, who once said of  
hymn singing:

**"It's such a dangerous activity ...  
you get this glow which can be mistaken  
for religious experience."**

\*\*\*\*\*           \*\*\*\*\*           \*\*\*\*\*

A question I'm asking this morning:  
what kind of **"glow"** dare we hope to nurture  
as religious experience here at Plymouth Church?

We have any number of religious institutions  
that dot the landscape of our city and state;  
quite an array, a profusion of piety. As a  
community that baptizes, as a people who  
sing and pray and worship,  
what dare we expect as an outcome  
of the faith we profess?

I'd like to develop just a couple of thoughts:  
(1) we aspire to live a glowing **faith**  
**based upon imitation;**

(2) we strive for **faith that glows with gratitude** and generosity.

Imitation and gratitude,  
these are primetime indicators of  
the faith I hope we exhibit.

Our lesson this morning invites a consideration  
of these two thoughts. Permit, I ask, a couple of  
observations about the lesson.

Luke has a special interest in Samaritans  
that is unique in our New Testament literature.

Matthew presents a contrasting portrait;  
in Matthew, when Jesus sent out his disciples  
to proclaim gospel, he gave instruction on  
who not to visit:

**“Go nowhere among the Gentiles,  
and enter no town of the Samaritans,  
but go rather to the lost sheep of  
the house of Israel”** (see Matthew 10:5-6).

Luke tells a different story.  
Luke doesn't simply mention Samaritans,  
he mentions them often, once in a negative light,  
and then in more favorable terms.

Let me explain.

When Jesus **“set his face”** to go to Jerusalem,  
he and his followers are said to have entered a  
village of the Samaritans, who did not extend  
a warm welcome. You may recall, James and John  
didn't take this well.

**“Lord, do you want us to command fire to come**

**down from heaven and consume them?”** (Luke 9:54).

This suggests, I think, James and John were likening the village of Samaritans to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jesus turned and in no uncertain terms rebuked them.

It is then rather surprising the degree to which Samaritans show up in unexpected places.

Remember the lawyer who asked:  
Teacher, what must I do to  
inherit eternal life?

This is a pretty significant question. Most churches, temples, shrines, cathedrals, mosques, have staked ground in a niche of faith promising life now and forever, an eternal solution to the temporal problem posed by death. If your're asking the question - then you darn well want to get it right.

Jesus questioned the man who questioned.  
What is written in the law? What sayeth Moses?

The man answered:  
love God, love neighbor.  
Jesus affirmed the answer, saying yes,  
you got it right; do this and you will live.

But the lawyer wanted to quibble;  
he wanted clarification, so he asked:  
Who is my neighbor? Jesus responded  
with the parable of the Good Samaritan  
(see Luke 10:29-37).

Jesus was making it quite clear:  
**“Samaritan lives matter.”**

This is really quite astounding,  
for the Samaritans were a people  
profiled back in the New Testament day,  
tainted by blood, an inferior, misbegotten  
people, a neighborhood nuisance,  
practicing a corrupt religious practice.

This religious and cultural antagonism  
between the Jews and Samaritans had a  
long history, going back half a millennium  
or more (read Erza 4:2). They both questioned  
the legitimacy of the nativity of **“the other.”**  
They led separate lives. They set up competing  
shrines, staked out space on different mountains.  
They did not mix.

This is part of the intrigue in our morning lesson.  
We have an instance where a shared disease,  
leprosy, has created a community - a  
community of outcasts bonded by what  
they suffer.

As we heard, a group of ten lepers spotted Jesus.  
They approached then halted, keeping a distance.  
They abided by the social code that prevailed.

**“Jesus ... have mercy,”** they called out.  
They asked for nothing else, save mercy.  
Jesus **“saw them”** and said: **“Go, and  
show yourselves to the priests.”**  
And go, they did.  
In going, they found themselves clean,  
whole, liberated from their affliction,  
released from their confinement.

One of the ten returned,  
falling at Jesus' feet, expressing thanks.  
Take note: thanks to Jesus, praise to God.  
This one is a Samaritan, a foreigner.

To the one, Jesus said,  
**“Get up and go on your way;  
your faith has made you well.”**

We might read this as  
**Rise, resurrect; glow;  
go on your way;  
your faith has made you whole.**

\*\*\*\*\*

The first observation -  
the writer of Luke is showing us a teaching of faith  
that is often missed, if not dismissed.

Faith saves,  
it is manifested in our lives,  
we grow,  
in this church, in the world,  
when we  
**“get up, glow, and go.”**

The Samaritan, along with his nine compatriots,  
were made whole, not for what they thought,  
not because of what they believed,  
not because they repented of any  
    real or glaring sin,  
but because they acted.  
They responded to the word Jesus  
directed to them.  
Whether they knew it or not,  
they initiated their break from their  
confinement in the hell that  
was imposed upon them.

A few years ago we had as a Parry Lecture,  
the New Testament scholar,  
Luke Timothy Johnson, whose work centers on Luke-Acts.  
What is faith for Luke? According to Johnson,

**“Faith ... means far more than belief,  
or even trust and obedience.  
It entails imitation of the messianic Prophet (Jesus),  
whose visitation is marked by sacrificial suffering”**  
(Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Living Gospel*, p. 134).

There exists in the heart of our faith and following,  
**moral purpose aligned with a love like that of Jesus;**  
our reverence of life in this world has  
what Niebuhr called **“ethical content;”**  
with our worship we echo God’s love,  
we respond to what we have received.  
We live life, not looking for miracles,  
but as miracle – as glowing people.  
The greatest miracle is a virtuous life  
(Thomas Aquinas), in accord with Jesus love.  
Would that we were all so blessed.

*(Niebuhr’s quote: “Without an adequate sermon  
no clue is given to the moral purpose at the heart  
of mystery, and reverence remains without ethical  
content.” (Leaves of Cynic, p. 55))*

\*\*\*\*\*

Another thought.  
For our children, and our children’s children, we  
are wise to strive for **faith that glows with gratitude**  
and generosity. And by generosity, I don’t mean  
dollars and cents, as important as our giving to the church  
is for present and expanding ministries. My thoughts  
are more pointed, to a faith that glows with gratitude  
of heart, and generosity/charitability in our assessment  
of others with whom we share life. This is what Luke  
offers us in his narration of the Jesus life.

Please take note.  
It is a strange land,

the setting of our lesson.

Not at all exact.

It is a “region” between Galilee and Samaria.

The region defines us and them;  
it separates the in from the out crowd;  
the region distinguishes the legitimate from  
the illegitimate; the pure from the defiled,  
the blessed from the cursed.

This is where we find Jesus engaging lepers,  
in their ghetto of shame and isolation,  
who were certifiably off limits, a shunned people.

I hope we understand –  
this is Jesus acting in defiance  
of the religious norms of the day.  
This is Jesus the contrarian,  
willing to enter into outcast lives,  
that God might be glorified,  
and perceived to be the agent of  
new life, new creation.

In Numbers,  
Moses received instruction to “**put out**”  
everyone who showed evidence of being leprous;  
they were banished to a region “**outside the camp.**”  
They were not permitted to be  
where God was said to dwell;  
they were confined in an absence of God  
(see Numbers 5:1-4).

Jesus engaged such people.  
Jesus transformed such people.  
He didn’t expect to be worshipped  
in response.  
But he does acknowledge the grateful

glow of the Samaritan who returned  
to express thanks, who was surprised  
by a grace he did not expect.

So too should we strive and pray  
to glow with gratitude.

**“If the only prayer you said was ‘thank you,’  
that would be enough.”**

Meister Eckhart

**Gratitude takes nothing for granted ... (it) is  
constantly awakening to new wonder and to  
praise of the goodness of God.”**

Thomas Merton

\*\*\*\*\*        \*\*\*\*\*        \*\*\*\*\*

Conclusion:

The church can be a community that glows:  
with love and mercy, with a fount that signals  
room, a place and people with whom to roam,  
free, forgiven, with imagination, with grace,  
with imitation of Jesus.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,  
for the demands of the day are many;  
so be charitable as you read; and remember:  
the contents of this sermon have not been edited  
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*