

# Turning Around

Wayne Waibel – 10/09/2022

Have you ever been part of a moment when the urge to look back has been so intense you would've had to fight your nature NOT to turn around? This is a very organic occurrence, and it happens maybe not often, but more than occasionally.

You're walking along, minding your own business say – down an aisle at the grocery store looking for a sweet deal on cereal. All of a sudden there is a compulsion to turn your gaze backward, and coming into your view is a young mother with a small child clinging to the shopping cart. She is scanning the shelves while her child is blissfully taking in all of the surrounding details.

All of a sudden, a clerk with a pallet of soda comes screaming onto the scene oblivious to the proximity of the mother and child. Had you not turned at that precise instant, you would not have been able to divert the rogue employee from changing the lives of a young family - and his own. Probably not for the better either. There is something quite extraordinary about the simple act of turning around.

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The story of the 10 lepers has many levels, but probably the least noticeable component is the Samaritan's singular act of stopping – turning around – and marching back to Jesus to express his gratitude. Why only one in ten?

Even Jesus has the immediate response of, "Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" And the fact that the one happened to be a foreigner is consistent with Luke's gospel of inclusiveness. The kingdom of God is open to all – especially the marginalized.

We learn from Luke that the chosen people of God are no longer the Israelites, but all of humanity. Jesus came into the world for the specific purpose of declaring that the kingdom of God belongs to all people – especially the poor and the outcast and the forsaken. Christ uses language that elevates the "unclean" among us to the highest rung of blessedness. They are not just mentioned – they are lifted up and held in esteem.

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Now that we are fully accosted by the onslaught of the mid-term elections, there is no escape from the litany of ads and promos and yard signs and news reports that have those elections as a theme. Most of us could not be less interested in either the races or the outcomes, and yet – most, if not all of our attention is commanded by these proceedings.

But every now and then, there is an isolated incident that involves someone who has stopped – turned around – and started the long journey back to normality. You are likely not going to see that in a political ad, because they do not fulfil the primary mission of such ads – which is to garner votes. We now live under a system that has as its primary focus - winning – not serving. I know that we as humans possess an inherent tendency toward flawed behavior, but come on.

The greater good has suffered as a result. No question. In fact, the sad truth is that there exist entire agendas built upon the premise that the greater good is no longer of any value. Too many people in positions of authority now believe with absolute certainty that they know best what is right and good for all. And it is not that the basic Christian response to God is gratitude.

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Salvation and healing are intimately intertwined. Not that you can't have one without the other, but they most commonly are two sides of the same coin. It's a thing of beauty, really. That's the way of a life of love in Jesus Christ. Salvation and healing. Turn around – return to that which justifies. We are given all the faith we need to do that.

When Jesus tells the Samaritan his faith has healed him, He is not dismissing the hand He has played in this scene, only putting an exclamation point on it.

The lepers active move to stop – turn - and then return to Jesus is the dividing line between phoning it in, and taking part. And we are a people that were meant for work and praise. All that the Master ever asked was that we love our God and each other as He loves us. Simple. Who can't do that?

The short answer of course is that we all too often get an idea into our head that we are somebody, or that we have all the answers, or that we know best how to achieve a rightness for all. I know truly righteous people who still say things like, "If everybody would just do it this way – there would be no problem."

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We not only do not have all the answers, but I also think it's safe to say we have none of the answers. The purpose and end of human existence is gratitude and doxology, not because of who human beings are, but because of who God is. The God before whom humans live is a splendor beyond human comprehension, to whom humans respond appropriately only in adoration and praise.

“In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and communion of the Holy Spirit we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.”

That excerpt comes from The Brief Statement of Faith in our Book of Confessions. Page 267 – section 10.1. This last entry in the Book of Confessions, was developed in response to the reunion of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, in 1983.

That union set the denomination apart from the world’s major denominations in its inclusiveness, use of both masculine and feminine references to God, and the beginning of equity in church leadership. Granted – we still have a way to go, but that’s the beauty of a reformed faith. It is always reforming. Making new roads. Holding firm to some positions, but allowing for critical review of others. Which is how we are able, as a faith community, to stop – turn around – and find our way back to a right relationship with our creator. Amen.