

*Sermon**The Rev. Lisa Graves**Oct. 10, 2010**“Broken Pieces”**All rights reserved.*

Last Sunday I attended
the Waukegan deanery dinner
at Nuestra Senora in Waukegan.
The church has just completed
building a new worship space
that is already too small
for the fast growing congregation.

The ladies of the parish
cooked for us,
tours were given
and an air of anticipation
seemed to fill the air.

Things were happening.
The Holy Spirit was talked about
as if it were another person
in the room.

They had recently confirmed
close to 150 young people.
They fed hundreds of hungry
friends and neighbors each month.
They were bursting at the seams
and bursting with joy and gratitude.

The Bishop and his wife were there.
They are a remarkably
easy couple to be with.
Thoughtful, interested, interesting.
They asked about St. Philip's,
Offering words of joy in all
The things that are happening here.
In the midst of the celebration
Bishop Lee was asked
to say a few words.
And so he stood and began
to tell a story of the last
House of Bishops meeting
he'd attended.

During the week some
Bishops and their wives
had taken a tour
to a border town in Mexico.

They spent time with a
Christian man who ran
an addiction help center.
A recovered addict himself,
he helped hundreds
of men and women
overcome their addictions
to alcohol and drugs.

The center was tiny,
overcrowded and underfunded.
But there was a sense of joy.
The director spoke to the Bishops
about their needs and failures,
their hopes and successes.
He spoke in their gathering room,
which was small
and stood on a floor that was
a mosaic of broken plates,
pottery shards and pieces of tile.

Someone asked him about the floor.
He looked at it a moment
and then smiled.
This floor is like us.
It's made from breakable things that
others throw out.
Broken cups and saucers
from restaurants,
broken pottery from stores.
Things from the dump.
They are seen as useless
and unnecessary
good only for trash.

But we need them.
We can use these pieces
and when we put them
all together they provide
function and beauty for us.

We are addicts.
We are broken.
We are seen as useless.
We are seen as having
no value anymore,
as being garbage.
But together we create
a community.
Together we experience
beauty and wholeness
in God.

As the Bishop told this story
I couldn't help but think
of our mosaic floor.
Individually the tiny mosaic
pieces are lovely but isolated.
When joined together
in a certain way they provide us
with a visual praise offering to God,
a memorial to those we love,
a gathering place
to bring others into
the family of God in baptism
and a reminder of our faith
and history and community.

The lepers were a community
of the isolated.
They were together
not by choice
but by quarantine.

The ancient world
feared leprosy,
which was not only
contagious, but polluting.
To be in the presence
of the lepers was to
make yourself unclean,
unworthy for company,
unable to worship
or gather or eat
with the community.

The law in Leviticus 13
required lepers to cry out
“unclean, unclean!”
when they either were
approached or approaching
the clean of society.
To a leper, the clean are everybody
but yourself.

You can imagine the pain
of identifying yourself
only as your illness,
your symptoms,
your contagion.

The only way to come back
into the circle of society
was to be seen by the priests
and declared clean.

Now Jesus is on his circuitous way
to Jerusalem.
He is approaching the lepers –
or they are approaching him,
and they have probably
called out unclean, unclean
as he comes.

Our gospel tells us that
the lepers keep their distance,
but they shout out
their hopes to Jesus
who they realize is a healer.

He has the power
to make them clean.
They cry to him for mercy,
shouting, “Jesus, Master,
have mercy on us!”

Jesus does not offer them
immediate cure or promises.
He tells them, Go,
and show yourselves
to the priests.

They go.

Now it is only as they obey
and turn away
that they are healed.

Do they go in expectation of cure?
Do they go in despondency,
thinking they are once again
being sent away?
We cannot know.
But showing themselves to the priests
has never been anything
but a life sentence
of separation until now.

But one leper, a Samaritan,
one who was considered
an outsider not only
by his skin condition,
but by the land of his birth,
he notices that he is made well.

And he is turns around
and his joy and thankfulness
bring him to his knees
in front of Jesus
and he offers praise
and thanksgiving
for the new life given him
in this miraculous
deed of power.

The other nine are gone.
Who knows why.
Were they simply following
Jesus' orders?
Were they in a hurry
to be presented to the priests,
anxious to begin right away
a life of inclusion
in their community?

Some say that the nine
were going to the priests
for proof and verification
of their healing,
but that the Samaritan

who was not welcome with the priests,
went straight to the source
of healing, to God
and his messiah.

He needed no intermediary
to offer his gratitude
and love to God.

The outsider,
as so often happens in Luke,
is the one to recognize Jesus
as the divine incarnation
and worship and offer thanks
for the transformation
only possible through him.

Now, our world still has lepers,
both those who suffer
with this disease
of weeping flesh
and also those who suffer
from the kind of isolation,
degradation and
social derision
that lepers experience.

There are those who shout
to us daily that they are unclean,
unworthy, unwanted.
There are those who keep
their distance from us,
those who are tossed
in the dumpster as useless
and broken.

But we know that to recognize
Jesus is to be transformed.
To be in relationship with God
and his Son is to be made
worthy and to be loved.

We are a divine mosaic
of broken vessels
that when placed in relationship
with one another create

something beautiful
and full of purpose.

Episcopal Bishops
Recognized this purpose
When they made
This statement
In 1978:

“The central meaning
of Jesus’ ministry
is bound up with the fact
that he sought the company
of people who,
for one reason or another,
were forced to live
on the fringe of society.
These he made the
special object of his attention,
declaring that the last
would be first
and that the humble
would be exalted
in his Father’s kingdom.
The church finds its true identity
when it fully integrates itself
with these ‘marginal’ people
including those who suffer
from physical and psychological disabilities.”

Indeed, part of this purpose
Includes experiencing
Joy and gratitude for our identity.
Part of our purpose
is to sing to the Lord
a new song in a world
where the lepers
and the broken
are sought out
and welcomed back
into society.

In our tradition
we have words
for that song in scripture
and in worship.

The Venite,
 a canticle used in daily morning prayer
 and other offices of the divine hours,
 offers us the language
 of psalm 95.

You can find in on page 82
 of the Book of Common Prayer.
 Perhaps the Samaritan leper
 found his mouth opening
 and his lungs bursting
 with words similar to these ...

*Come, let us sing to the Lord; * □
 let us shout for joy
 to the Rock of our salvation.
 □ Let us come before
 his presence with thanksgiving * □
 and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
 For the Lord is a great God, * □
 and a great King above all gods.
 □ In his hand are the caverns of the earth, * □
 and the heights of the hills are his also. □
 The sea is his, for he made it, * □
 and his hands have molded the dry land.
 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, * □
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker. □
 For he is our God, □
 and we are the people
 of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. * □
 Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!
 Amen.*