SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — October 12, 2025

Translation issue from last week's Gospel that sheds light on this morning's Gospel:

- NRSV (1989) of Luke 17:12b: "ten lepers approached Jesus . . ."
- NRSVue (2021) of Luke 17:12b: "ten men with a skin disease approached Jesus . . ."

Is this an example of "Wokeness" that MAGA Christians like to mock? Is there anything wrong with simply using the term "lepers"? Before we answer, here's the actual Greek: *deka leproi andres* — most literally: "ten leprous men." In other words, the underlying Greek recognizes their humanity as their most basic identity, which the NRSV translation glossed over. The more recent NRSVue does not; is it "woke"?

Consider other contemporary examples:
- "enslaved persons," not "slaves"
- "undocumented persons," not "illegals"
- 'people alert to injustice,' not "woke"
- 'people who support Donald Trump,' not "Trumpers"

What's at stake? Answer: Losing sight of one another's full humanity. As soon as we do that, we can begin to justify violence against others since they are somehow less human than we are. "Wokeness" at it's best seeks to hold onto the full humanity of all people. It does so by raising awareness of times and places in our history where injustices are carried out against those whom the dominant culture sees as less human, or even as no longer human — when we name the others as "monsters," "beasts," "vermin," "evil-doers," "snakes," "Satanic," etc.

Today's Gospel Reading consists of two parables, each with two main characters, where Jesus shows us:

- one character, who people in first century culture would have been inclined to see in a position of honor, but that character

fails to recognize the full humanity of the

- other character, who people in first century culture would have not been inclined to see in a position of honor

Let's take a quick look at each parable.

<u>Luke 18:1-8</u>
- The 'honorable' character is the judge, but Jesus warns us right away that the judges lack of respect for God leads him to not respect other people — that is, to not recognize their full humanity, most certainly not this widow who keeps bothering him for justice
- In first century culture, a woman's honor and rights were dependant on the men in their lives, so a widow's honor and rights are in question with the loss of their husbands. Jesus elevates this widow as a model of a woman who fights for her honor and rights so persistently that even an unjust judge grants them to her.
- Moral of the story: isn't God someone who sees everyone's full humanity such that God is inclined to hear us and grant justice? And, will the "Son of Man," who represents the new way to be human, find people who live faithfully in the way of a God who treasures each person's full humanity?

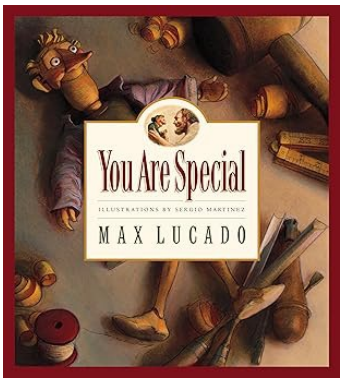
Luke 18:9-14

- The 'honorable' character is the Pharisee, but he shows himself to be a self-righteous person who looks down his nose at others, failing to recognize the full humanity of "other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector."
- Tax collectors were seen by Jews as having no honor because they collaborated with their Roman overlords. But this tax collector acts with seemingly genuine repentance, praying for God's mercy.
- Moral of the story: God treats them both as having full humanity, and so as having equality of justice before God. (This depends on a better translation of "this man went down to his home justified *rather than* the other." The Greek word translated "rather than" is the preposition *para*, from which we get our word "parallel." Its basic meaning is "alongside" or "with" or even "same as." How does it change the meaning if we translate the above phrase, "this man went down to his home justified *the same* as the other"?) When those we humans exalt are humbled and those we humble are exalted, they end up side-by-side — equal, parallel, in God's sight.

Two very different stories that illustrate today's parables. The first comes from a book I just started reading, *Why Christians Should Be Leftists*, by Phil Christman. He gives a compelling testimony about a time in his freshman year of college that he began to be converted from dividing the world between winners and losers, while reading Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with fellow students, who were still mostly stranger s to him:

> I won't say that these other people were suddenly transfigured in my mind, that I suddenly saw the glory of God shining out of their faces. But a fundamentally other way of thinking about them suddenly appeared to me as an option; a wholly different map of the world abruptly unfolded in my mind, in which — this is as close as I can get to summarizing it — each of these people was a subject that a person could love, and was capable of giving love to others, and was therefore infinitely precious and infinitely interesting. That whole economy of losers and winners, with its implied scarcity of worthiness, had disappeared. Or not disappeared but receded: it didn't seem inevitable or fully real anymore. It seemed like a lie that needed to be undone by the constant practice of universal, constant, and unvarying love. . . . I felt aware of the possibility of an impersonal but absolute love: a sense of what it might be like if all of us willed what was best for each other as intensely as we will what's best for ourselves, and the possibility of letting go of my self-will because I know that every other person cherishes me as though I were their own life. No longer rigidly holding on to myself, because I know I am upheld. What I felt was the possibility of universal solidarity.

The other story is from a children's book, *You Are Special*, by Max Lucado. It's the story of wooden people, called Wemmicks, who mark winners and losers with stars and dots. Punchinello, a Wemmick with all dots, visits his maker, Eli:



> Eli stooped down and picked him up and set him on the bench. "Hmm," the maker spoke thoughtfully as he looked at the gray dots. "Looks like you've been given some bad marks." "I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard." "Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, child. I don't care what the other Wemmicks think." "You don't?" "No, and you shouldn't either. Who are they to give stars or dots? They're Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn't matter, Punchinello. All that matters is what I think. And I think you are pretty special." And as Punchinello left, one of his dots fell off.