

When you're just not feeling it

Ever have a day when you say, "I'm just not feeling it?" What you mean of course is that there is something you want to avoid.

Someone says, "Hey, there's a big clean-up day at Triune. Wanna go?"

"I'm just not feeling it."

"Want to come over for dinner tonight?"

"Sounds interesting. What are we having?"

"I'm making my famous sardine and Sauer Kraut casserole."

"It's very kind of you to remember me, but, at the moment, I'm not just feeling it."

It's Monday morning. "Are you going to work today?"

"You know, I'm just not feeling it. Think I'll take a sick day."

Sometimes it is the special language of relationships. A wife says to her husband.

"I'm going to visit my mother. Do you want to go?"

"I love you honey, but I'm just not feeling it."

A husband says to his wife, "I'm going to the junkyard to look for a carburetor, you want to go with me?"

(You know the answer). "Yeah, I'm just not feeling it."

"I'm just not feeling it" is a way to avoid dealing with an unpleasant part of our lives. "I'm just not feeling it" is a way to run from something. What we'll see this morning is that sometimes when we are just not feeling it, we can run toward something rather than running away from it.

Jesus Cleanses a Leper Luke 5:12-16

¹²While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy.¹³ And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ¹³And Jesus¹⁴ stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." ¹⁵But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

The Gospels are full of accounts of Jesus healing. This particular passage has been covered tens of thousands of times by people far more capable than me. Rather than give you a detailed breakdown of the passage, what I would like to spend a minute or two on is the disease itself: leprosy...and how it affected people who carried it. Jewish law established how lepers were to be treated. The book of Leviticus, chapter 13 verse 45, tells us:

"Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'

In other words, make it clear to other people that you are to be avoided at all costs. The odds are that no one here has had leprosy. It is rare in the United States. But, I'm willing to bet some folks here have been treated like they had it.

What was known about leprosy at the time Jesus healed this man was that it could be transmitted to other people. The safest course was to keep lepers away from healthy people. What wasn't known at that time is that leprosy is caused by a bacterial infection. It can be treated with a course of antibiotics. If the infected person is treated early, he or she may avoid lifelong impacts. But leprosy is sneaky. The bacteria that causes leprosy is slow-growing. It may not have a serious impact for years. But when the bacteria has done its work, it damages nerve endings, particularly in the arms and legs, to the point that an infected person no longer feels pain. Sounds good, right? No pain. The problem is, of course, is that pain is the body's way of letting us know something is wrong.

With an advanced case of leprosy, burn yourself on a hot stove and not notice. Stump your toe time and time again, and not know it. Step off a curb and break a bone in your foot and not feel it. Eventually, the impact of all these undetected injuries leads to the breakdown of the tissue and joints in hands and feet. At its worst, leprosy leaves people with stumps where fingers and toes once existed.

If someone with leprosy said, "I'm just not feeling it," they were absolutely right. Yet, here was a man with leprosy who *was* feeling that he was different, who was feeling that he needed to be healed, who was feeling that he wanted to be brought back into the world. Here was a man who wanted to be made whole.

And Jesus, knowing that he wanted to be made whole, healed him.

There is a different type of disease alive and well in the world today that reminds me of leprosy. Some of us are carrying around anger or resentment

or something that even approaches hatred. Some of us feel unloved and underappreciated. Some of us are bitter that life hasn't been fair to us while it has served others very well.

And like leprosy left untreated, our own form of illness gains strength over the years until we can't feel the damage we're doing to ourselves and to others. We've held on to it the point that not feeling just feels normal

I first visited Triune the year Deb became pastor here. It was a different place then. It was a place where the service might, or might not go, exactly as planned. The special music might, or might not, be special; the scripture reader might, or might not, show up. It was chaotic, it was unpredictable and sometimes it looked hopeless. There were days when Deb probably wanted to say, "You know, I'm just not feeling it."

But in the end, none of that mattered because she was committed to her calling, even when she didn't know where it would take her. She gave up the safe bet. She came to this place. It was raw, it was real, it was life without all the niceness built in to established churches.

It began to change lives, slowly, for it took a while for people to get past thinking, "I'm just not feeling it today, or tomorrow, or this year or next year." But some did and more followed. People who were treated like modern-day lepers found....that like the leper who asked Jesus for help, they could get help here when they decided they wanted to be made whole.

And then those of you who no one ever thought would be here because you were in established churches began showing up because you sensed this is what the church is supposed to be.

You have built something real here, but I offer one thing to remember and it comes in a song. In 1973 the Eagles released a song that begins like this:

play intro.

Desperado, why don't you come to your senses, you've been out riding fences, for so long now...Oh, you're a hard one, but I know that you got your reasons. These things that are pleasing you, can hurt you somehow.

The next to the last verse begins, "Don't your feet get cold in the wintertime, the sky won't snow and the sun won't shine. It's hard to tell the nighttime from the day.

And then there is a line that is almost a throwaway until you stop and think about it...

"You're losing all your highs and lows, ain't it funny how the feeling goes....away."

In Revelation, Chapters two and three, there is a message to each of the seven churches in Asia, what is now modern-day Turkey. The last church mentioned is the church at Laodicea. "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

Churches that are going through the motions are moving toward a certain death. People who have decided to avoid pain at all cost aren't dead, but they aren't really living either. I believe God created each of us to be alive and vibrant. Sometimes that means confronting who we are.

Triune was revived, for it was near death, to be the place where people are received as they are and given the chance to confront who they are and what they can be. You are all equal here, you know. All of you have something to give and all of you have needs to be filled. That's what makes a church a church. Jesus healed people who asked him to make them well, to make them whole. He left us to be his hands and feet. Triune is here today to be Jesus' hands and feet, to heal lives in the name of Jesus. Triune is here for you, for me, and for people who haven't walked in the door yet because they just aren't feeling it. But some day, some day they will and Triune will be here ready to help make them whole.

If you've been living your life by just not feeling it, today is a good day to confront your pain or your numbness, to ask the Jesus *that heals* to make you whole, to ask the church *that serves as Jesus' hands and feet* to walk with you.

About 1700 years or so ago, Augustine of Hippo wrote words that will stand for eternity, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." In more modern language, "You made us for you, God, and our heart is restless until we find rest in you."

We were made for communion, communion with our Creator and communion with each other. As we celebrate communion with Jesus this morning, my prayer is that each of us will find that we can feel it after all.

Amen

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord make me us an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred let us sow love

Where there is injury, pardon

Where there is doubt, faith

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light

And where there is sadness, joy