

## Of Scuzzies and Sozo

Firelands Presbyterian Church    October 10, 2010

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7    Psalm 66:1-12    2 Timothy 2:8-15    Luke 17:11-19

“A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” there were two groups of people who lived in neighboring communities. But they weren’t very neighborly. If one traced their histories back a number of generations, they’d all been one people, but there’d been some disagreements about the proper way to worship Ya-wah (their name for God), and both groups had basically packed up their marbles and gone home, each retreating to their own side of the boundary they established between them. And the Sammies and the Gallies from then on had accused each other of terrible things. *Why, the Gallies think that both women and men can be priests of Ya-wah*, the Sammies said in horror, *when everyone knows that only women are holy enough to lead in worship*. And the Gallies came back with *Those Sammies! They play the oldest, dullest music in their worship. It’s a wonder anyone can get through a worship service without falling asleep!*

And of course those differences grew: The Sammies came to accuse the Gallies of not restricting marriages to one man and one woman, and the Gallies taught their children that they should never, ever accept candy from Sammies.

And so the two groups continued on their ways, knowing that their neighbors were very strange and dangerous people. For the most part, they ignored each other—except on the no-man’s-land along either side of the boundary line between the two groups. It’s not that any “regular” Sammies or Gallies actually lived there, but that was where both groups sent the people who were just too weird, too dangerous to live in society. People who twitched and stared into space and heard voices in their heads. They were called Scuzzies, and the disease—which was known to be a punishment from Ya-wah for horrible sins—was called scuzz. Scuzz was very contagious, they believed, so Scuzzies had to be isolated from the rest of society. Once one of the priests of Ya-wah—either a Sammie priest or a Gallie priest—had decreed that a person had scuzz, that person had to move immediately to the borderland and live with the other Scuzzies. That way, good Sammies and Gallies didn’t have to encounter Scuzzies, and they didn’t have to worry about catching scuzz from them.

The theory was that if a Scuzzie got over the disease and no longer twitched and stared into space and heard voices in their heads, they should go back to the priest to be declared cured. But that scarcely ever happened. Like virtually never.

Life for the Scuzzies wasn't much fun. They were separated from their families and forced to live only with other people who also twitched and stared into space and heard voices in their heads. They were unable to work in any regular kind of jobs; the only way they could get money was by sending scam emails selling fake pharmaceuticals.

And then one year, sometime in January, they started hearing about a Gallie miracle worker named Jesus. This Jesus traveled around the Gallie countryside telling stories and preaching—and (more exciting for the Scuzzies) healing people, too. There were even some rumors that he had healed a couple of people of scuzz. That was certainly interesting, though most of the Scuzzies didn't really believe it was possible.

But when they heard that this Jesus was going to be in the area—actually traveling through the borderlands between Sammie-land and Gallie-land—a group of about 10 of the Scuzzies decided that it was worth investigating. They knew that they didn't dare get too close, but they wanted to at least set eyes on this Jesus character. When Jesus and his band of followers came through, all of them Gallies, the Scuzzies could see the followers holding their robes up so they wouldn't accidentally touch any of the dirt that might be contaminated with scuzz, and also walking very carefully on the Gallie side of the boundary. The Scuzzies stayed at a distance and shouted, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” which was their way of asking for healing.

Jesus looked at them. Really looked at them, and saw beyond the twitching and the staring into space and the voices—saw the human beings, the children of Ya-wah. And he said, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

The Scuzzies weren't quite sure what to do, but they decided *Oh, what the heck. What's the worst the priests can do—send us back out to live with the other Scuzzies, right?* And so they set out, the Sammie Scuzzies into Sammie-land to the Sammie priests, and the Gallie Scuzzies to the Gallie priests. And as they walked, they realized that they weren't twitching any more, and they were looking at each other and at the beautiful hills and grass instead of into space, and the only voice in their heads was the one saying, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” Hey! They were cured! “Wow! That worked,” they said

to each other as they laughed and shouted for joy. And they skipped and ran to get to the priests more quickly.

Except one. One Sammie Scuzzie—or former Scuzzie—turned around. She turned around and started running back to the borderland, back to that Jesus guy, and all the way she was yelling, “Thanks be to Ya-wah! Thanks be to Ya-wah!”

And when she got to Jesus she threw herself down in the dirt to worship him and, trembling with joy, cried out, “EucharisTEo, eucharisTEo,” which means *thank-you, thank-you God*. And Jesus smiled at her and then turned to his followers, the ones with their robes carefully held up to avoid both Scuzzies and Sammies, and said, “Ten were healed, but only one has come back to praise God. And that one is a Sammie.” And the followers looked at each other and whispered, *A Sammie! A no-good Sammie?*

Jesus looked at the woman, who was trembling with joy, and said, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has sozo’d you.” Sozo’d her—made her well, made her whole, saved her.

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People’s lives were changed that day, long ago, there in that galaxy far, far away. Some of Jesus’ followers began to realize that Jesus’ message and love and healing were not just for Gallies, as they had assumed, but for everyone. Ten Scuzzies were healed and restored to their families and their friends and their livelihoods. And one of those former Scuzzies was not just healed of her scuzz but was also transformed so that she lived as a whole, a living, breathing, beloved child of God.

How? Through her faith, her “faithing,” which called her to worship God in thanksgiving. For what is faith without gratitude? “To practice gratitude is to practice faith,”<sup>1</sup> as theologian Kimberly Bracken Long wrote. And what is the result of practicing gratitude, practicing faith? Joy! Wholeness! One-ness with God!

Our gratitude to God—for all the blessings in our lives and, in times of sorrow, for God’s presence in our lives ... our gratitude to God makes us whole. The very first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism put it this way: “**What is the chief end of man?** Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (7.001)

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberly Bracken Long, “Luke 17:11-19 Pastoral Perspective,” in David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4*, p. 166.

To glorify God and to enjoy God forever. That was the gift Jesus said the tenth Scuzzie had—glorifying God and enjoying God forever ... wholeness/healing/salvation. And it is the gift that is available to us at all times.

Glory to God, Glory to God, glory, hallelujah! Let us glorify God and, in our gratitude, live holy and joyful lives.

Amen.