

Luke 17:11-19

Praising

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice." (17:15).

There is something to be said for celebrating Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a remembering. Remembering the good things in our lives and saying thank you. But to whom do we give our thanks?

It may be to the people in your life. Often, we say we are thankful for this person or that. It may be a friend who knows just when you need a little pick me up. It may be that there was enough money to enjoy a meal out. It may be the fact that there is a food bank that one can go to when there just doesn't seem to be enough to feed oneself and children while still keeping the power on in order to stave off the cold.

It may be gratitude that the cancer is in remission, or thankfulness that the cancer, though yet to be beaten is at least being treated. One may be grateful for a driver's test passed, whether one is young or older, in order that there is more freedom to be where you want to be when you want to be there.

At points in our lives we are grateful for the freedom we experience as individuals and in this country, and we may be grateful for those who come along side us in our time of need.

One thing that is certain is that gratitude changes us and it can change relationships. When one is grateful or able to give thanks, even in challenging situations, it gives us hope, it changes the way we experience challenges and people. Gratitude has a way of making us whole.

Now, just as a point of clarification...many of us grew up with the story of the Ten Lepers, but research has taught scholars and historians that the Greek word translated for years as leper actually just meant, someone with a skin disease. Now the fact that there were these ten men with a skin disease, signals that in some way these men were not able to be fully engaged with their community. Their skin disease would have meant that they had to keep their distance from others. Remember that the way we understand disease and health issues today is a far cry from how people would have viewed those same things in ancient times. They did not know how to medically treat those who were ill and so often it was seen as uncleanness ritually rather than medically. So, when Jesus hears their plea to be made clean, he sends them off to show themselves to the priest because it was the priest, not a doctor, who declared one healed and able to be restored to the community.

And going back to the healing, in the story you may note that Jesus didn't ask for them to have faith that they would be healed. In fact, he didn't ask anything of them but to do what was necessary according to the norms and requirements of the community that were already in place. It was on their way to the priest that they were healed, all ten of them.

And though part of this story is about faith and healing, it is as much a story of thanksgiving as anything else. We don't know what happened with the other nine who were healed. They may have been very thankful, did what was asked of them by going to the priest and then were so joy filled that they ran immediately to their families. If you have not been able to be with family for a time because of your skin or anything else, that is likely what most of us would do, is present ourselves whole and clean to our families so that we could rejoice with them. But there was that man who becomes the one that teaches us about gratitude, about faith, and about praising God.

This one alone turns back to Jesus. Now he was not Jewish so once he was healed, which was before getting to the priest, he could have thought, "Why should I go to a priest? I am good to go. I don't have to abide by these Jewish requirements." He could have just gone home, however that is not what happened. Instead, when he realized that he was healed he "turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus feet and thanked him." (17:15-16)

Put that image in your imagination. See the man. He realizes he is healed, turns back and loudly praises God. Then he falls at Jesus' feet and thanks him. This story is about realizing that God is the one who walks with us in our lives at all times. God was with the man even when he was not healed, but there was something about recognizing Jesus and what Jesus had done for him in that moment that brings about praise.

It is then that Jesus adds something more to the conversation saying, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." There are a few ways this sentence could have been translated, it could also be read as "Your faith has saved you." This man had not only been healed, he had experienced something more than the nine who did not return. His faith, his trust, his gratitude expressed directly to Jesus and to God was what changed everything. It helped to restore him to relationship with God.

John Buchanan writes about C.S. Lewis,

C.S. Lewis, as he explored his newfound faith, observed the Bible's, particularly the Psalter's, insistence that we praise and thank God. He also observed the connection between gratitude and personal well-being. [Lewis wrote] "I noticed how the humblest and at the same time most balanced minds praised most; while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least. Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible."¹

¹ Buchanan, John M. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 4 Season After Pentecost 2*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P165.

Karl Barth was known to say that “the basic human response to God is gratitude – not fear and trembling, not guilt and dread, but thanksgiving.”²

It is here that Jesus is teaching about what it means to have faith or is telling us something about faith. Faith is not a matter of cause and effect. In other words, if I pray hard enough or have enough faith Jesus or God will heal me or fix a relationship, or whatever it is you are hoping God will do. Faith is about life...living out our lives in a posture of gratitude and praise. To have faith is to live faith, and to live faith is to give thanks to God.

One thing I know for certain is that when one gives thanks it changes the way we interact with one another. It changes the way we interpret the events in our lives. It makes us aware of the goodness and preciousness of life and those around us. It is also a gateway to deeper and deepening relationship with God.

When we recognize the source of our life, not even death can take away our praise, our gratitude, and our faith. Will we continue to have difficult and really hard days or seasons in our lives. Pretty much guaranteed that will be the case. We live in a broken world. How we live in it each day can be and will be determined by our gratitude.

It does not mean that we don't strive for different, for better, for wholeness in our body, mind, and spirit. That we don't look to help a struggling world, beginning with our own families and then looking around us to see where God is calling us to be present with others. We need to do that work, yet in the meantime find every opportunity to give thanks. To say thank you to those around you who need to hear a word of gratitude and also to say thank you to God, to praise God for the goodness we experience, even in the midst of the things that make life hard.

Your faith will heal you, fully heal you, because we know that healing of one's spirit is the most important piece to feeling whole and healed. Our bodies and minds may never fully recover in this life, but our spirit can be made whole and that makes all the difference in all the rest of our lived experience. Today as you go from this time of worship, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

We trust this word because of Christ, because of God's love and faithfulness, and because of the Holy Spirit living in each one of us. Amen.

² Ibid.