

Living with an Attitude of Gratitude
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Luke 17:11-19 NRSV

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten people with leprosy approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.

I would like to preach from the theme, Living with an Attitude of Gratitude. I realize that Thanksgiving isn't until next month, but God's grace and mercy are so incredible that we have reason to give thanks not only in November, but 365 days of the year. Everyday is a day of Thanksgiving. It never hurts to reflect on our blessings and to say thank you God for all you have done for us.

Thank you is one phrase we could use a bit more often in our discourse that would make our society a bit more palatable. We could say a bit more regularly, ***I'm sorry*** (and really mean it. Not just sorry you got caught) ... ***I made a mistake*** (and own it) ... ***I love you*** (when there are no strings attached) ... ***How can I help you?*** (and be sincere and wait for an answer) And, we could say ***thank you*** much more often than we do. After all, people do not have to be kind or generous toward us. If we use these phrases, at home, at work, at church, with our family and friends the world would be a better place.

When I was in seminary in Rochester, NY one of the things I never got used to was the lack of courtesy when I purchased something in a store. Clerks seldom said thank you. In those days, people still used money to pay for things. This was before debit cards, ATM's and online banking.

Somebody knows what I'm talking about. So a clerk would give you your change and your package and say nothing. You just went on your way.

Well, some of us grew up having to say thank you, you're welcome, please, may I, yes ma'am and no sir. When we entered a room, we were expected to speak to everybody. Now days, some young people and old people enter a room and don't speak at all.

In our text today there were 10 men who found their way to Jesus as he entered a village on his way to Jerusalem. These 10 men had a dreaded skin disease called leprosy. Those diagnosed with leprosy were banned by law from being in their home community. They were required to live away from those they loved, away from their families, and away from their faith community. When anyone came near to them, the person with leprosy had to shout unclean, unclean, unclean.

Those who have gone through major illnesses know it is hard enough just coping with a debilitating illness, loss of control, and the fear of never getting well. But, then to be ostracized and literally kicked to the curb on top of all that must have been devastating.

We look at this text and think this kind of treatment could never happen in our 21st century sophisticated world, but it happens everyday. Those living with HIV/AIDS still carry the stigma of having a disease with no cure. Some living with cancer may feel shame wondering if there is something they did that caused their bodies to be vulnerable to cells that mutate uncontrollably. We give a wide berth to those living with ALS and autism. Those with mobility issues, in wheelchairs and on crutches face obstacles. Even with ADA laws that require access to all public places, there are still places those with mobility challenges cannot go. So although we may not have **laws** that relegate our sick and disabled outside of their beloved communities, we have ways to make them feel unwelcome.

So these 10 men with leprosy called out to Jesus. They took a chance that Jesus would hear them and see them. They took a chance that they would be healed. Sometimes we have to take a chance and claim our healing. It is so easy to get stuck in a pity party and say woe is me. Things will never change. The 10 who were sick could have said Jesus is too busy. He is on his way to Jerusalem and won't have time for us. Well, things will never change if we don't do something and get out of our own way.

Sometimes we have to take a chance for our own healing. We can take a chance that going to the doctor won't be that bad. We can take a chance that getting off the couch and going to the gym won't hurt that much. We can take a chance that eating a salad instead of a pizza or lasagna won't taste that bad. We can take a chance and do some things to promote our own healing.

So the 10 took a chance, and Jesus heard them and saw them. For me, this is one of the most important themes of this text, Jesus saw them. He could have easily ignored them and walked the other way pretending not to see or hear. But he saw them. Our God is never too busy for us. God is just a prayer away. We may get too busy and forget to reach out for God. But, God is never too busy for us. God sees us.

We all want to be seen and recognized. Even when we are not well, we want someone to know and show compassion. Jesus was able to see the condition of these men with his eyes and his heart.

Sometimes we see with our eyes, but our hearts are somewhere else. We see the hundreds of tents in parks and under overpasses. But our hearts are not moved to advocate for affordable housing and adequate social services. We see Black Lives matter signs all over but we do not want to talk about our privilege because it makes us feel uncomfortable. Our eyes see the impact of global warming and environmental pollution and dumping on poor communities and communities of color, but our calendars are too full to do much about it.

But living with an attitude of gratitude, is to see the world with open eyes and open hearts. And open eyes and hearts will probably lead us to open checkbooks and open calendars. The great humanitarian and holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel who recently passed said, "When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude.

Baxter, my 90-pound black lab mix, has many neighborhood dog friends. So whenever we go out for a walk, I take treats because I never know who we are going to run into. There are twice as many dogs in our neighborhood as children. So frequently Baxter and I stop over Smooch's house. Smooch is an American Eskimo dog with three legs and a bunch of

long white fur that gets all over my clothes (he lost one leg to cancer). Smooch, is about ½ the size of Baxter and when I see Smooch, he goes nuts jumping up and down on his three legs trying to get my attention so he won't get left out of the treats. Every time I say, Smooch I see you and Smooch usually gets his treats first.

As we walk life's journey we all want to be seen and recognized. No one wants to be ignored. We may need some space and want to be left alone for a season, (and in womanist thought that is considered very healthy) but that is different from being ignored.

Jesus saw the 10 in need of healing and had compassion for them. Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priest. On the outside chance one with leprosy was cured, a priest had to give the OK that the person was cured and could rejoin the community. That was a lot of power given to religious leaders. But I'm not going to go there today. That thought is for another sermon.

And as the 10 were going to the priest, a change began to take place. The dreaded disease began to fade away. My sanctified imagination tells me that the dry, ugly, scaly, patches of skin became soft, smooth, and touchable again.

Amazing things happen in our lives when we are obedient to God's way. Hearts of stone become hearts of flesh when we say yes to God. Our energy is renewed when we put God first and not our own egos. Relationships are healed when we seek God's wisdom. Now, gratitude will not erase bad memories or pull together a bad relationship that never should have happened in the first place. But gratitude will help lessen the pangs of tough memories.

God wants our obedience, not our sacrifice. Jesus didn't tell the 10 to climb a mountain, swim across two lakes, and look for a one eyed goat to sacrifice. No, just walk and show yourself to the priest. We do not have to sacrifice ourselves, our families, or our livelihood for the sake of serving God.

Our call as disciples of Jesus Christ is to love. Jesus said in John's gospel, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have

loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Sometimes it is the simple things that God calls us to do that trip us up.

So as the 10 went on their way toward the priest, they were completely healed. But before they got to the priest, one was so overcome with thanksgiving and gratitude that he returned to Jesus to say thank you.

At times God blesses us beyond our wildest imagination and the only appropriate response is a praise offering. I have heard some of you say you are cancer free. Well, that is worthy of a praise offering, a hallelujah shout, and a thank you Jesus! If you still have a good paying job or a good pension, you have reason to do a holy dance, hallelujah! If you woke up this morning with a reasonable portion of health and strength, a roof over your head, clothes in your closet, and food in the refrigerator, that's reason to praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Christian writer, William Arthur Ward said, feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it away. Sometimes we just have to praise God and say thank you, thank you, thank you.

If we are honest, we are not entitled to God's grace and mercy. There are some skeletons in our closets. Donald Trump is not the only one who has some skeletons hanging around. Say amen for your neighbor. We have all said things we regret and done risky things. But, it was God's grace and mercy that kept us. God puts a hedge of protection around us at times to protect us from ourselves.

Jesus asked the man who came back, were not 10 healed? Where are the others? Jesus reminds us that sometimes we do not get the thanks we deserve. That is just the way life goes. We don't know if the other 9 were so overcome by their good fortune that they forgot to tell Jesus thank you. Maybe after they went to the priest, they doubled back to find Jesus and tell him thank you. The book doesn't say. We just know that one man who was a foreigner-the least likely to return- was so overcome with grateful for his healing that he turned back to tell Jesus thank you.

I know that if we had to choose which person we resonate with in this story, most of us would identify with the one who returned to Jesus to say thank

you. But I also hope you are the one who said thank you for the meal that was prepared for you last night. I hope you said thank you for the ride you got to church today. I hope you said thank you to your spouse, neighbor, or friend, just for being who they are. We ought not take our blessings for granted, for there is a good chance that someone else would love to have what we have taken for granted.

As we think about our financial pledge for next year, our giving is in gratitude for how God has blessed us. God does not need our money. The psalmist wrote the cattle on a thousand hills belongs to God. But in order to do the ministry that SFBC is called to do, we will pledge our gifts next week in gratitude not obligation. I was so blessed last year on pledge Sunday to see so many people come forward in gratitude. I really was blown away and there is no way I am going to miss the blessing of next week. And because we have been blessed we can't help but give our wrapped gifts to others.

I praise God for you. I praise God for SFBC. I praise God for love and life. So let us stand and sing our closing hymn, #8 Praise to the Living God.