

Living Everyday in Gratitude  
Luke 17:11-19

A reading from the Law, Leviticus chapter 13:

“The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean’. He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp”.<sup>1</sup>

To say the very least, it was a rough life.

We can’t imagine quite how fully disease must have unhinged a person’s life in either ancient or Jesus’ time. Not only were people with leprosy living with some form of illness, but they also couldn’t just go off and be “unclean” in private:

they had to proclaim it to the world ... while being segregated *from* the world.

They were trained to keep their distance, even from Jesus – who they’d apparently heard about, to judge by their call: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

Who knows what response they could have been expecting.

They may have *hoped* for a kind word or some wisdom to sustain them in their situation; more likely they’d have prepared themselves for being ignored, run from or verbally reviled.

Who knows what they expected when they begged for mercy.

They probably hadn’t predicted being healed.

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Many of us have heard today’s Gospel reading from Luke before.

If you’re like me, when a story – any story – becomes familiar, you might tend to gloss over it, hit the key points and move on.

Ten lepers sought mercy, 10 lepers were cleansed, one man, the outcast among outcasts, turned back.

As with those sappy forwarded emails in my inbox, I think:

“I’ve read this one, it’s nice”, and I go on to the next thing.

There was no next thing in today’s passage.

This is it: The one, the Samaritan leper turned back.

He gave thanks to God and to Jesus for his healing.

He stopped, it seems, for only a moment;

he stopped to express gratitude *in* the moment.

Granted, this was a big deal – a *huge* deal!

How long had those 10 been outsiders, “unclean” and unable to take part in either family or faith?

Not only were they set apart from physical relationships and home, they were barred from ritual life, from God as they understood God.

Being cleansed meant *everything*.

Who can fault the 9 for being caught up in their newfound life?

There were so many possibilities before them, so much to factor in.

They were CLEAN!

And perhaps some of them were anticipating their presentation to the priests  
for inspection and confirmation of cure;  
perhaps a couple were anxious about reuniting with family and friends;  
perhaps one or two were resentful toward the  
system that had kept them isolated for so long;  
perhaps all were worried that this good thing might not last.

For whatever reasons, the 9 were caught up – and they missed the moment. They missed thanksgiving.

I am fully aware that it is only October, and our national Thanksgiving holiday is still a month away –  
we haven't missed it.

But with this text before me, it was really hard not to choose for today all the hymns  
that we tend to reserve for once a year.

The one leper who returns brings with him a reminder of thanksgiving *in every moment*;  
a big picture message that often gets lost amidst our little daily expressions of ingratitude.  
We're not intentionally grumpy – at least not most of us – but sometimes we too easily forget  
that thanksgiving can be a daily spiritual act.

I'll share an example of my own forgetting from this past week.

I was overjoyed that our parking lot was getting its *final paving* last Monday and Tuesday.  
Not only because of the practical reality that it make things around here safer for all,  
but it also means we are *really* nearing the end of construction.  
That's a joy. **Praise God. Give thanks. Amen.**

Then, when I arrived here on Wednesday morning, we were told that paint striping of parking spaces  
would happen *that day* - earlier than expected by several days.

Again, this was a good thing – but did I **praise God, give thanks, amen?**  
Of course not!

Instead, I got all un-thankfully frustrated  
at yet another timing change and the impact it would have on Plymouth life.

My reasoning went like this:

Paint striping meant wet paint.  
Wet paint meant no parking.  
No parking on Wednesday meant  
the choir, the bell choir, the new members and the OWL class  
all parking in the lot next door...  
and then walking in the dark through the  
grassy, hilly, construction-littered DARK  
to return to their cars.

My attitude of gratitude was all used up last Wednesday morning.  
And, even with the good, I couldn't seem to get myself un-grumpy.

Happily, after some productive communication everything worked out:  
 we got the painters to do one section of the lot first  
 so we could use just as many parking spaces as we safely needed that night.

AND (this is big) we now have *all* of our spaces painted for this Sunday morning,  
 which significantly aids our members who can't walk long distances.

*This* is a bigger picture.

I honestly wish I could tell you that I was thankful in the moment –  
 that I was the one in the story who turned back in thanksgiving for a good thing –  
 because that's the person I'd like to be.

Sometimes it takes me a little while to remember that.

I imagine the same is true for many of you, as well.

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This same Wednesday evening in our New Members class,  
 we watched the DVD made about 2 years ago for Plymouth's Capital Campaign.

I listened – maybe for the 15<sup>th</sup> time – to stories of gratitude by members still among us,  
 and to the memory of gratitude by those who've gone before us.

I watched once again the choir practicing on a Sunday morning  
*squeezed* into my old office because there was no other space.

And all my little ingratiitudes of the day broke open  
 in the face of THIS:

the bigger picture and the big thanksgiving.

Not just for new offices and choir space and a parking lot –  
 but for the fact that we *have* a choir,  
 and offices,  
 and new members  
 and a building –

and for all the God-given mercies in our lives.

**Praise God. Give thanks. Amen.**

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Remember in Luke's Gospel when the one returned and offered his thanks,  
 Jesus blessed him with these words:

“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well”.

All 10 lepers were made clean, healed; but only *one* became *well*.

They were all cleansed, bodily health renewed;  
 but it is clear that for Jesus there is more to wellness than the physical.  
 There is *renewal* that happens in our faithful response to God –  
 there is renewal in expressing our gratitude.

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We can make that distinction between being healed and being well in many ways.

Today the message that the Still Speaking God has whispered for me in *this* time and *this* place  
 is a Word of every-moment-gratitude.

It's a gentle reprimand in Jesus' query,  
 “But the other 9, where are they?”

Was none of them found to return and give praise to God?”

It's a remark on our forgetfulness as we sometimes communicate carelessly...

...yet it ends with thanksgiving, and with the grateful one being more than healed – *he is made well*.

None of us can be well when we are caught up in what is wrong –  
 you don't feel well when you are on the receiving end of someone's frustrations,  
 nor do you feel well when you're the one expressing frustration!  
 We're not well when we focus only on the world's problems  
 without rejoicing in what is good.  
 We're not well when we forget to take the moment to turn back.

While this message is not an invitation to sit by and be thankful or even content when something isn't right,  
 it *is* an invitation to step back and reflect on how we can still *be well* when facing what's wrong;  
 how gratitude can alter our approach to a new situation,  
 and possibly even bring renewal.

As we've begun the church year with so many changes and so much in flux, I've been trying  
 ...I emphasize *trying*...  
 to reframe my responses to each new & challenging situation.  
 Instead of noting all the ways that something doesn't work, or why a situation is not right,  
 I try to ask, What will work better, for me?  
 What builds me up, or what would be good?  
 Instead of stating what's wrong, ask yourself what works – turn it around.  
 That turning is an act of gratitude for what is good.

Like the one who returned in the story, if we allow ourselves to stop a moment –  
*even in the middle of something big and new with unknown effects-that-we-have-to-consider* –  
 if we allow ourselves to *remember* to express gratitude to God and one another,  
 we give Jesus the opportunity to reply to us also:  
***your faith has made you well.***

**Praise God. Give thanks. Amen.**

<sup>i</sup> Leviticus 13:45-46.