

November 23, 2003
A.M. Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Thankfulness”
Luke 17:11-19 NLT

11 As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. 12 As he entered a village there, ten lepers stood at a distance, 13 crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

14 He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, their leprosy disappeared.

15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God, I'm healed!" 16 He fell face down on the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? 18 Does only this foreigner return to give glory to God?" 19 And Jesus said to the man, "Stand up and go. Your faith has made you well."

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where, He would later tell His followers (Luke 18:32-33), that there He would be “handed over to the Romans to be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon. They will whip him and kill him, but on the third day he will rise again.” In doing this He would take away the sin of the world and give eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Jesus was walking on the border between Galilee and Samaria and just before He entered a village there He came across 10 lepers.

Ten In Need:

They stood at a distance because the law required that they must. They would not be allowed to enter the village and if they saw someone they were required to shout, “unclean, unclean!” So people would know they were lepers and would avoid them. They not only avoided them because of the disease but also because of their belief that they were inflicted with the disease because of a particular sin. These lepers heard about Jesus because they called Him by name. Perhaps they heard about another time Jesus entered a town and had met a man with an advanced case of leprosy (Luke 5: 12-15). Jesus touched that man with leprosy. No one had touched him in many years and when the only one who would touch him, did touch him, the man was healed of his leprosy and news about Jesus spread. So when the ten with leprosy saw Him instead of crying out, “unclean, unclean!” They cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Jesus did not stand at a distance but walked toward them and got close enough to look at them and see they had leprosy and they were able to see the *love and compassion in His eyes*.

Did you know that leprosy is still a terrible problem in today's world? (I read this report recently:) In India alone, there are 4.5 million cases. In India, there are around 150,000 leper colonies. And each colony houses 500 families. That's the size of a small town, all full of lepers! Just like in Bible times, these people are completely rejected by society. And so, many ... native missionaries have been called by the Lord to go to these leper colonies, take the love of Jesus Christ, and plant churches. When riots broke out in west India, several leper colonies were destroyed. With no home, no food, and no hope of anyone helping them, our brothers and sisters responded. They brought cooking pots and food, helped them find shelter, and shared the Gospel with them. (A Christian group called "Gospel for Asia" is) preparing to begin a new comprehensive outreach ministry to 15-20 leper colonies this year. This outreach will include church planting, a clinic, and a primary school in each colony. (One) Brother Nand recently wrote ... saying, "I have begun ministering among the lepers. Through this ministry twelve people were saved in the last six months." Jesus still touches the lepers.

But strangely in our story today Jesus did not heal the ten lepers immediately but told them, "Go show yourselves to the priests." For according to their law if any one was cured of any skin disease it had to be confirmed by the priest who would then give a certificate indicating that the person was set free to once again mingle with the rest of society. Christ's purpose, no doubt, was to *test and strengthen their trust*. For Jesus did not even give a promise of their healing but asks them to rely on an implied promise.

What are you asking Jesus for? *Sometimes we too must act on the assumption that Jesus has granted or desires, even while we are not yet conscious that it is so.* Sometimes we too must set out for the priest while we still feel the leprosy. (One time I had an "old bomb" of a car. I was having trouble with it. I prayed, "Well Lord, you know I need a car and you know I can't afford one right now, please help me." And I remember feeling excited about the fact that there was nothing I could do, but I knew God was going to do something. Instead of feeling worried or down I was anticipating and trusting in what God was going to do. I was an assistant pastor at the time and one of my responsibilities was the Senior Adult Ministry [S.A.M.]. A woman from that ministry told me of a lady who lived on her block. An elderly woman who had just lost her husband and was very depressed. She didn't have many friends. People thought she was strange and avoided her. So I went to visit her. I tried to encourage her and I prayed with her and I invited her to S.A.M. [And she did eventually accept Christ and became a part of that ministry]. But on the day of my first visit with her, just before I left she said, "Can you use a car?" I said, "Why did you ask me that?" And she replied, "I don't drive and my husband's car is just sitting in the garage. If you want it you can have it." I said, "Well, how much do you want for it?" She said, "I don't want anything for it, just take it!"). Now, sometimes I have needs and I pray about them but I am still uneasy about what the outcome might be. We should praise God in faith when we have prayed for a need even while we have not yet seen the answer to our prayer. And I suppose, the ten did take a step of faith for they obeyed Jesus and went their way. And as they went, their Leprosy disappeared. But to nine of them Jesus was merely a healer. They had gotten what they wanted and now they turned their backs on Him.

One Gives Thanks:

Of the ten some were Jews and some were Samaritans. I don't know how many were Jews and how many were Samaritans. I do know that usually Jews and Samaritans didn't hang out together. The Samaritans were a mixed race; they had a false worship and acknowledged they were part Jewish only when it was convenient. When things were going well for the Jews the Samaritans would remind people that they too were part Jewish. And when things were not going well for the Jews they would remind others that they were not Jews. But because of their misery and alienation these ten found a common bond to keep them together. I read somewhere that in time of severe storms some animals that would normally be natural enemies have been seen cuddling together for safety.

What a strange and wonderful feeling it must have been when these ten were walking and their bones started to become strong and gradually they realized they had been healed. One of them said he wanted to go back and thank Jesus and praise God for he had not yet realized that Jesus and God were the same. But the other nine would not go back to give thanks. They were too anxious to get to the priest and get their freedom. Maybe they said, "Hey we're just doing what we were told to do, it is our duty to go to the priest." But one who is grateful knows that it is his duty to express that gratitude. *How like us all it is to hurry away clutching our blessing and not go back to thank the giver.*

As a kind of side note Luke mentions, "Oh, yeah, by the way, this man was a Samaritan!" The ones for whom Jesus came for first did not come to Him in thanksgiving but the outcast comes. And when this Samaritan came back to Jesus he shouted, "Praise God, I'm healed!" And He fell face down on the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. His healing brought him nearer to Jesus than before, now he can fall at His feet.

Jesus asked this man, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Does only this foreigner return to give glory to God?" The Lord is sad as He wonders about man's ingratitude while being joyful for the stranger's thankfulness. *Some go off with their gifts with no spark of thankfulness in their selfish hearts* (I'm preaching at an interfaith service Wednesday from Deut 8:10-20 that speaks of how people, like us in America, when we have so much we tend to forget God by not thanking Him, by not keeping His commandments and by even being proud, believing all we have is our own doing.). As in our story the number of thankless are more than the thankful. *We increase the appreciation and the love of our gifts and blessings by our thankfulness for them. We lose and God is dishonored when we fail to give thanks for all we have.* Some people cannot see any good in anything. Others see good in everything.

Many Blessings For The One Who Gives Thanks:

Jesus rejoices over the one who returns to give thanks and praise to God and gives him a greater gift. Yes, even a greater gift than being healed from his disease. (v19) Jesus tell the man, "Stand up and go (to the priest as originally commanded to do, for that was their law)." And then adds, "Your faith has made you well." Some versions say, "Your faith has made you whole." The Greek word (sozo) literally means "to save." He was made

whole because not only was disease removed from his body but also from his soul. A faith that began in a confidence that Jesus could heal and was willing to obey a command to go to the priest was deepened by an expression of thanksgiving and praise and resulted in a love for Jesus who brings salvation – a healed spirit to a “stranger” and the stranger becomes a friend. *Giving thanks to God results in a deepening of our understanding of faith and grace.* When a stranger turns to Jesus and believes they find salvation for their soul and an awakening of their spirit. Even when a Christian gives thanks to God it results in a greater understanding of God’s grace. Only the one who returned to give thanks heard the words, “Your faith has made you whole.”