

October 9, 2022

Luke 17:11-19, *The Message Bible*

It happened that as he made his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met him. They kept their distance but raised their voices, calling out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Taking a good look at them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. He kneeled at Jesus’ feet, so grateful. He couldn’t thank him enough – and he was a Samaritan. Jesus said, “Were not ten healed? Where are the nine? Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?” Then he said to him, “Get up. On your way. Your faith has healed and saved you.”

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Right up front; here at the beginning of my sermon, I am giving you all you really need to remember when you leave worship this morning: The only prayer one needs to pray is comprised of three words: “Thank you, God.”

That’s it. That is the prayer we should be praying “without ceasing”, all the time, everywhere.

This is not easy though. There are many days in my life that “thank you” not only didn’t cross my lips, it never even dawned on me to think it, much less pray it. There are lots of times when my thoughts and prayers are not thank-filled. And I am not alone in this. Ninety percent of the lepers healed in today’s Gospel story did not say or pray a word of thanks – and they were healed! This caused Jesus to ask: “Were not ten healed? Where are the nine?”

Where are the nine? Why did they not say thank you? We are left to speculate. And, speculate we can, because there are clues that open the door to our imagination. The biggest clue is Jesus referring to the one who came back to say thank you as an outsider, a Samaritan, or in our society today, an African-American.

Here is someone who was on the outside not just because he was a leper, but also because he was a Samaritan in a majority Israelite society. He was probably very much aware of his being on the outside looking in. So, when he discovered his ailment was cured, he noticed. He also was probably surprised. He probably didn’t automatically assume he was deserving of a cure, which is possibly why he was thankful.

What about the other nine? In truth, we don’t know, but we can speculate. What are the things that keep us from saying “thank you”? One of the major reasons is assuming it is our right; assuming we are entitled. Quite possibly all those nine other lepers were Israelites, true believers. As such, they probably thought they shouldn’t have had leprosy in the first place. Ah, the assumptions of the privileged. No need to be thankful, if I was supposed to be healthy in the first place, right?

When we are privileged, we wear invisible blinders. These blinders turn all life’s burdens into some kind of undeserved punishment, which in turn causes us to wish for relief from whatever the burden is. If relief does come, for some the natural reaction is to say, “Well, it’s about time.” Or, they assume they were responsible for the lifting of the burden. Either way, God or thanking God is not on their minds.

Maybe one of the things keeping the nine men from thanking God is their appointment calendars. Now that they

are well and re-integrated into society they have to go see all the people they had been distanced from and keep all the new work appointments so they can pay their bills. They just got too busy to take time to thank God.

Maybe they had been sick for so long they had gotten out of the habit of regular worship and had even forgotten about God and how to pray. Being thankful is a learned state of mind.

Privilege and busy-ness and lack of practice are just some of the things that can keep us from praying “Thank you, God.”

For many of us our lack of praying “Thank you, God”, without ceasing, may well be because we are in too much pain or too scared or too hungry or too fearful of dying and thank you is not what we are feeling. I understand this problem completely. I can find myself so overwhelmed with life’s problems that even if I wanted too I can’t honestly pray “Thank you, God.”

I am here today to tell you, though, I am working on this. What helps me are some of the deep faith truths passed on from those who have gone before, one of them being: “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” So, just because I struggle to be thankful when life is not working out as I think it should, I am learning “Thank you, God” is still the only prayer we should pray, as difficult as this is in the midst of trouble and despair.

I say this because of how today’s Gospel story ends. You see, whatever the reason, the Samaritan noticed and came back to say thank you. The result of acknowledging God’s presence in his life with a prayer of thanksgiving led to more than healing, he was also saved. Saved here means we find

ourselves in right relationship with God, the Source of Life. It is a healing of body, mind, and spirit; a healing with scars; a healing in the midst of pain and sorrow; a healing that allows us to live filled with light, no matter how dark the moment.

I am beginning to learn and to trust in the power of giving thanks with a grateful heart no matter what situation I find myself in. I wish I could tell you I have perfected this discipline and pray without ceasing, “Thank you, God.” I am not fully there. But, what helps me in those moments when I struggle to turn back, as the healed Samaritan did, and say thank you, is my time spend with you in this faith community; time spent worshipping with you and praying with you. Your support offers light in dark times.

In some ways praying “Thank you, God” is “a fake it ‘til I make it” type of exercise. But as I practice this in my life with your support, I find myself being changed, transformed. It is becoming easier, even on difficult days, to look for the good and then say thank you.

I am very much aware that what I am saying is something very difficult to put into practice. Following Jesus was never easy. But when we are willing to try, when we are willing to allow those around us to help us, when we live, work, and pray together in faith, then we will be able to say and pray “Thank You”, no matter where we are on life’s journey or how difficult the struggle.

So, let me begin: For the gift of this faith community in my life, thank you, God. Amen.