

October 13, 2019  
Rev. Kerry Smith

Luke 17:11-19 Coming to our Senses: More than Meets the Eye  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 17:11-19 New Revised Standard Version

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers 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."

Brene Brown tells a story in her Call to Courage special on Netflix about her daughter's senior prom night. Brene was imagining all of the things that could happen to her daughter as her date pulled up with his old pick-up truck. Brene didn't want to ruin the moment, but all she could think about was her daughter getting in a car crash. She stood at the porch waving and saying, "I'm so grateful, Have fun, honey! I'm so grateful for this moment. Have a great night! I'm so grateful to be a part of this process!" Even though her husband and son looked at her like she was crazy, she was helping herself lean into joy.

Brene Brown says we are terrified of joy because when we let ourselves feel joy, we are so worried about being sucker punched by pain. When something joyful comes along, we dress rehearsal tragedy so we are ready or we diminish the joy to protect ourselves from potential pain. It's like when you send a text and you aren't sure how it is going to be received. You see the three dots and you can't breathe while you wait for the response. One way to not dress rehearsal tragedy and lean into joy is to practice gratitude.

Imagine in your life if you were able to practice gratitude in those moments when you would rather do anything but. You are in a hurry and the person that you are with is taking their sweet old time to gather all their things and make sure that they have it all, and they need to run in and get one more thing. You know that you are running late but you breathe and you try to practice gratitude. You are in the check-out line at the supermarket and there is a problem with the person in front of you. One of their items isn't ringing up and the manager has to be called. You have more errands to run and somehow you have picked the longest line, again. You breathe and you try to practice gratitude.

I'm grateful. It is a choice that we make to be grateful. Maybe the next time someone asks us, "How are you?" Instead of saying, "Fine." We need to say "I'm grateful". There were ten who were healed that day. One had an awareness that he had been healed, he turned back to acknowledge that healing, he gave praise to God, he thanked Jesus, and he went on his way. Gratitude helps us to see more than meets the eye. Gratitude helps us see through God's eyes. It helps us see the wondrous love of God who is the giver of life.

We see in this story the wonder of God's love. Jesus transforms the lives of ten people who had been shunned by their community, ostracized because were they ritually unclean. They couldn't participate in the Temple services and rituals at the center of their faith. Their disease disfigured them physically and because it reduced their ability to feel pain, it led to wounds going untreated. In Jesus' day, leprosy was considered highly contagious, with no known cure. There was no hospital, no shelter, no family or friends that they could visit for help. They couldn't enter the villages or cities. They were outside of their community, alone and desperate. These ten men realize Jesus is coming near them, they call out to him for comfort, for someone to listen to them. Jesus tells them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." The law in Leviticus

required that if you were healed from some disease that had ostracized you from the community, you had to go to the priest. The priest would certify you were healed, so you could be restored to your place in the community. As they went, they were made clean.

Can you imagine how the ten felt? Months had turned into years of suffering for their chronic condition, and now they had a brand new life. I can understand why the nine rushed home to hug their families, but Jesus seems disappointed. To the one who returns, Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." The word Jesus uses is *sozo*, it means made well in the sense of being healed. It can also be translated as saved, as in brought through mortal danger. Or it can be translated as made whole, being complete, made to be what you were meant to be all along.<sup>1</sup> The one who returned to give thanks is saved, he is made clean, he is made whole. In giving thanks he became what God had intended all along. All ten were physically cured, but only one became whole. Only the one who praised God in a loud voice, turned back to Jesus, laid down at his feet, and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

The Samaritans were hated. Imagine the hatred between the Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland or the hatred between the streets gangs in Los Angeles. The hatred went back a long time, back before the separation of the northern and southern Jewish kingdoms. In the ninth century BCE, Judah and Israel separated and King Omri of the Northern Kingdom bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer (1 Kings 16:24). He built the city of Samaria which became the capital. Two hundred years later, the Assyrians conquered Samaria and there was intermarrying between the people who lived there and the new people from Mesopotamia and Syria that moved there.

Over time, the Samaritans developed their own religious traditions, and worshipped at a sanctuary closer to them, not the temple in Jerusalem. Closer to Jesus' time, the Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple and in retaliation the Samaritans scattered the bones of the dead in the temple in Jerusalem. There was so much hatred between Jews and Samaritans that in Jesus' time, Galileans would go around Samaria on their way to Jerusalem even though it added more time to the journey.

The one who was thankful was a Samaritan. The one who was thankful saw what the others didn't see. He saw more than meets the eye. He saw his physical flesh restored to its normal condition as a gift of love from God. He was made whole once he experienced and expressed gratitude. He noticed grace, he saw goodness, he paid attention to healing, he stopped to take in blessing.

Enjoying life as a precious gift from God. Gratitude is what restores us and heals us and completes us and saves us. I remember visiting someone who was in very poor health and asking what they wanted us to pray for. They said for peace on earth. I remember being a bit in disbelief. I asked if they wanted to pray for their own health and they said, no, they were going to be okay no matter what happened, but there were so many people in the world who were really hurting. So, we prayed for other people, and I remember my heart lifting as we were transported out of that hospital room into homes around the world, spreading love.

I wonder how Jesus felt about the nine who did not return to give thanks? I think his heart ached for them. They had not yet become the people God hoped for them to be. We were made for gratitude. Gratitude completes us and saves us and transforms us and makes us whole. All day long, we are making choices. We may feel a range of emotions to all kinds of circumstances and situations, but we choose which to give expression. We have an encounter with someone who is angry, do we respond with anger or do we choose empathy, trying to understand the

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2019/10/pentecost-18-c-the-secret/>

emotions of the other person and gratitude that the other person was willing to be honest? When we experience a set back at school or at work, are we frustrated or do we make the choice to keep at it and feel gratitude for what we've learned through the setback?

Here's the thing about gratitude. Just like anything else, it becomes easier to choose the more we practice it. Gratitude is like a muscle that can be strengthened over time. So can anger and self-doubt if we allow them time. We seem to live in this age of complaint; so, we have to practice gratitude. It is a counter-cultural witness that can shape those around us, push back the resentment and the complaints that are all around us, and make room for new eyes that help us see God's renewing, saving grace. Gratitude helps us come to our senses and see the gift of the world around us. We have to practice giving thanks and sharing our gratitude. We have to develop some muscle memory for gratitude and thanksgiving. It can start with a gratitude journal, writing down 3 things each day that you are thankful for. It can start with saying "I'm grateful" the next time someone asks you, "How are you?" Let's practice. "How are you?" "I'm grateful."

Gratitude is not a command, it is an invitation that God never gets tired of making. It's like that old joke, you can wake up in the morning and say, "Dear Lord, it's morning." Or you can wake up in the morning and say, "Dear Lord, it's morning!" Gratitude is a way of life. Jesus tells us, "Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well." We are called to go on our way, to go out and give witness to God who is full of love and majesty. The world needs to hear about the one whose righteousness endures forever. The world needs to hear about the one who is amazing. It takes awareness, turning back, praising, gratitude, and then going on our way.

When I'm in the car, driving, running errands, focused on the next thing on my to-do list, feeling alone, I often sing a song that was popular when I was in youth group. It helps me to feel connected with God, it helps me to stop, turn back, and give praise to God. "Our God is an awesome God, who reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power, and love, our God is an awesome God." Amen.