November 20, 2016

Luke 17:11-19

An Attitude of Gratitude

Rev. Kerry Smith

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.’

 I am a glass half full kind of person. I try to look for the good or the positive in any situation. So, when I talk about this story in preschool chapel I focus on the one who came back to Jesus to give thanks. I say to the kids, “Jesus was so happy that someone thanked him.” I want the children to take away the idea that being thankful and saying that you are thankful is important. It is important because it lets the light in.

 But did you notice in the Scripture, Jesus didn’t say come back and thank me after you have been healed. The ten lepers called out to Jesus, they called him their master, and Jesus told them to show themselves to the priests. They trusted Jesus. And as they walked, they were healed. They were doing what Jesus said to do, they were on their way to show themselves to the priests. In Jesus’ day, if you visited a priest after you had been cured, then you could reenter society again.[[1]](#footnote-2) The nine lepers had their mind focused on the future. They could see themselves becoming a part of their families again, sitting at the dinner table, back at their jobs, in their neighborhoods, and communities.

 One leper saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He laid himself at Jesus’ feet. Flat on the ground, his face down facing the earth, in a posture of reverence, respect, worship, and also submission. And this person, he was a Samaritan, a foreigner. And we as the reader think of another story in Luke’s Gospel where a Samaritan plays a central role. We think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. We remember that story where the priest and the Levite, an assistant to the priest were so focused on where they had to go, they were so focused on what they had to do that they passed by when there was an opportunity to help a wounded neighbor on the side of the road.

 Jesus tells the one leper who returned to thank God, “your faith has made you well.” And the verb sozo is used, not a physical cure, but made whole in mind, body, and spirit. That verb sozo is used when Jesus talks about salvation, that is, being healed in mind, body, and spirit. The one who was grateful for the grace received was made whole, he received salvation.[[2]](#footnote-3)

 So, is this story about having good manners? Is this story about making sure that you send thank you notes?[[3]](#footnote-4) There is nothing wrong with good manners or thank you notes. This story reminds us that to be made well in mind, body, and spirit we must add thanksgiving to our faith. When we live a life of thanksgiving we are not only made physically well, we are made well on the inside as well. Some of you during the month of November keep a gratitude journal and write down something that you are thankful for each day. That is a great spiritual discipline.

 A few months ago we had a party at our house, so I got out my mother-in-law’s urn for iced tea. After the party was over, I was putting it up and I forgot that the stand is a separate piece. The stand fell to the ground and shattered into hundreds of pieces. I was in shock and then I couldn’t stop crying. My mother-in-law had made it and painted it and given it to us, and she couldn’t make us another one because she is one of the saints in heaven. And just then my husband Lee came into the kitchen and saw me there sobbing and he didn’t know what in the world was happening. Later that week we were having dinner with Lee’s Aunt Sally and I told her the story. A few days later a box appeared on our front porch. It was from Lee’s Uncle. He had sent us the stand from the iced tea urn that he had that Lee’s mom had made. I was overwhelmed with his generosity and I called to thank him. He said, “Well, I had two and you had none, and I don’t need two.” The gift of that new urn stand was wonderful because it was Uncle Tom’s way to share love with me. Now, Lee’s mom painted ceramics and my new urn stand is blue ribbons and the urn itself is yellow flowers, but it all exudes love so it matches somehow! I thought about bringing it to you today, but you will see it at our Pastor’s Open House Dec 4 from 2-4 pm. You are all invited.

 When we are sad, we console one another and we try to be a light for one another. That’s what we do. We live a life of thanksgiving, with an attitude of gratitude because it brings us wholeness in our mind, body, and spirit. And this impulse that we have to thank others, it is related to our impulse and desire to thank God. All day long yesterday I was singing this song, “In the Lord I’ll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice. Look to God, do not be afraid, lift up your voices the Lord is near, lift up your voices the Lord is near.” Last night I texted Kristi that I wanted to sing this song and then I looked at the bulletin that was printed two days ago and I realized that Kristi already chose for us to sing this song as we close our worship today! I don’t know if I saw it in the bulletin and remembered it or if it was from the Holy Spirit, but what powerful words. “Look to God, do not be afraid, lift up your voices the Lord is near.” When we focus on the good, when we have an attitude of gratitude, we remind ourselves about the giver of all love, about the giver of all grace, about the giver of all forgiveness, and we share that love and that grace and that forgiveness with others.

 Here in this place, we are called to share the love, the grace, and the mercy of Christ. We have diverse opinions but we are called to listen to one another. We are united in our acceptance and celebration of God’s grace and love. And that same grace and love defines how we treat each other. Our expression of that grace and love will not always be perfect, but if we continue to learn from and listen to one another, we will continue to grow toward being the expression of God’s love in the world and to each other. That means that we advocate for the common good without questioning one another’s commitment to that common good. May we continue to grow toward being the expression of God’s love in the world and to each other.

 “In the Lord I’ll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice.” Amen.

1. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithforward/2010/10/an-attitude-of-gratitude-lectionary-reflection-on-the-10-lepers-luke-1711-19/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithforward/2010/10/an-attitude-of-gratitude-lectionary-reflection-on-the-10-lepers-luke-1711-19/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithforward/2010/10/an-attitude-of-gratitude-lectionary-reflection-on-the-10-lepers-luke-1711-19/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)