

**Year C, Pentecost 21**

**October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**Luke 17:11-19**

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### **Is Gratitude a Form of Faith that Makes Us Well?**

Jesus and his disciples are heading south toward Jerusalem and are currently between Samaria and Galilee. It's no man's land; the space between; like a declining neighborhood outside the city center but before you get to the suburbs, the area where the refuse spun out by vigorous currents, gathers and remains with no place to go. The rejected live there because they are not welcome in either Galilee or Samaria.

In this in between place there is a village and at least ten lepers live there. Their connection with one another is their common exclusion from their families, friends and the wider community. They are alone, feel alone and suspect no one, not even God, cares about them.

Respectfully "Keeping their distance, they call out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" They know people don't want to get close to them lest they catch their disease and they accept that. But they hope Jesus will be different and not reject them like the others and so they call out.

When Jesus sees them he says, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." That's all he says. He doesn't touch them. He doesn't heal them. He just tells them to go and report to their priests. They know they can only approach the priest if they no longer have leprosy but at this point they still have it. Jesus is telling them to go before there is a reason for going. Will they do what Jesus says? Will they trust him even when there is no evidence to support their trust? Trusting Jesus is a choice and a spiritual discipline we all engage and how we engage it determines whether we do what he asks us or not.

In the gospel story just before this, the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus responded by saying if they had the tiniest amount of faith they could ask a mulberry tree to move into the sea and take root and it would. The point seemed to be that you don't need

more faith, you need to exercise the faith you have and like good slaves do what you are told and if you do, you will be surprised. Will these ten lepers exercise the bit of faith they already have? After all, they had enough faith to call out to Jesus.

The story continues, “And as they went, they were made clean.” This happens as all ten journey in response to Jesus’ command. They had faith the size of a mustard seed and the mulberry tree did uproot itself and re-root in the sea. What they had not dared dream could happen, happened. The mercy they had requested actually comes to them as they go forward. Could this be the Good News of the Gospel—that all of us have been cleansed of that which separates us from God and this cleansing comes from God’s side in the form of Jesus telling us to journey forth trusting that all is well, will be well and in all ways, is well? Could the mulberry tree’s move from land to sea be the movement from “you get what you deserve,” the world’s way; to “you have been blessed to live in a sea of grace,” the new kingdom way that Jesus is announcing on his trip toward Jerusalem?

At this point the story reveals its focus. “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.” One turned back... His gratitude was a decision. He **saw** what had happened and **turned back**. The others saw and kept going. Could it be that gratitude is seeing the blessing and deciding to thank the one who has blessed us? This former leper seeing what has happened sees God’s face in Jesus and chooses in gratitude to make Jesus the center of his world. Our text says, “He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.” He fell to the ground at Jesus’ feet and said thank you. From his position he looks up to Jesus and sees everything with Jesus in the foreground.

When we see everything with Jesus in the foreground we discover that God is nothing but forgiveness, gentleness, blessing, benevolence, compassion, and tenderness. Our response to all of this, once we get it, can only be gratitude! This is huge!

The other nine former lepers trudged toward the priest still operating in a world of fear and punishment where “we get what we deserve.” Even though their healing was a gift and quite the opposite of “you get what you deserve,” this old world was the world to which they were resolutely returning. The same old, same old; life returned to “normal”. They were healed but

not whole for in refusing to express gratitude they exclude their God of love who has invited them to live in a world of grace. Instead they go back to their old God who judges and is chronically cross. Choosing to live in gratitude would have changed all that.

Now we are ready to notice a bit of information Luke has withheld until this very moment. The one who returned was a Samaritan. The Samaritan's and the Jews hated each other. How is it that the one who Jesus' people hate, who the other nine in the group look down on, turns out to be the only one expressing gratitude? Did the others believe they deserved to be healed because they were better than this Samaritan? When the other nine noticed the Samaritan had turned back they probably thought he had not been healed and therefore did not qualify to meet with the priests. Their exclusionary attitude blinded them to the truth and made it impossible for them to follow the Samaritan's lead, turn back and express gratitude. They acted like they deserved it and so missed the joy of being made whole and the truth about their dependence on God.

When the Samaritan returned to Jesus, and he alone, "Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?'" Jesus seems surprised and disappointed that his own people refuse to praise God for the healing they had received. Jesus knew that without gratitude they would feel they deserved what they had been given and their sense of entitlement would sever any possibility for joy and truth. In amazement Jesus exclaimed, "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.'" Is gratitude a form of faith that makes us well?

In a beautifully illustrated children's book entitled "Grateful, a Song of Giving Thanks," John Bucchino shares this poem:

*I've got a roof over my head. I've got a warm place to sleep. Some nights I lie awake counting gifts instead of counting sheep.*

*I've got a heart that can hold love. I've got a mind that can think.*

*There may be times when I lose the light and let my spirits sink...*

*But I can't stay depressed when I remember how I'm blessed!*

*Grateful, grateful. truly grateful I am. Grateful, grateful. Truly blessed and duly grateful.*

*In a city of strangers, I've got a family of friends. No matter what rocks and brambles fill the way. I know that they will stay until the end.*

*I feel a hand holding my hand. It's not a hand you can see. But on the road to the promised land this Hand will Shepherd me...*

*Through delight and despair, holding tight and always there.*

*Grateful, grateful. Truly grateful I am. Grateful, grateful. Truly blessed and duly grateful.*

*It's not that I want a lot, or hope for more or dream of more.*

*But giving thanks for what I've got makes me so much happier than keeping score.*

*In a world that can bring pain, I will still take each chance...for I believe that whatever the terrain, our feet can learn to dance.*

*Whatever stone life may sling, we can moan or we can sing!*

*Grateful, grateful. Truly I am grateful. Truly blessed and duly grateful.*

*Truly blessed and duly grateful.*