

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans  
“How can I say ‘Thanks’?”  
Luke 17: 11-19  
Pastor Jonathan

October 13, 2019  
Thanksgiving Sunday

It’s a good day to share one thing in our lives for which we are thankful to God.

Let’s do so now. Let’s do so at the Thanksgiving dinner table. Just like this. I know. I too have an extended family that’s mixed in its belief and trust in God. Still, taking a moment for one thing in our lives for which we are thankful. That’s good. Right?

You know the Scripture we didn’t read today: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18)

Sometimes we wonder about God’s will. Does he want me to do this or that, change my life in a major direction or not? But one thing we don’t have to debate, and that is a thankful heart to God for the fullness of His many blessings in our lives, starting with Jesus Christ, knowing Him, knowing the forgiveness of our sins, knowing that He cares about our lives and wants to influence them all for good, for His mission on this earth. Thank Him at the hospital in the neo natal ICU? Yes. Thank Him for His presence there with Gracelyn and with all of us. Thank Him in the midst of the consequences for bad decisions we have made, and ones that have been forced upon us... There is almost always a way to get at being thankful. I know we don’t thank God for evil, or perpetual harassment from the evil one and his forces. No. But we do thank God for His continuing resources and energy and creativity to live in His direction by the power of His Holy Spirit in us, working out His will, even in the most challenging, difficult and the times that are hardest to figure out. We know the depth of our sins, or perhaps God is allowing us to know the depths of our own brokenness through others. We are all sinners. Some things happen to us that are not our fault, that affect us the rest of our lives.

I starting see a dermatologist at age 6 or 7 for cystic acne. I was covered on my face, chest, back and other parts in the early teenage years, and the dermatologist would take pictures of the excessively large lesions. I was presented to a dermatologists’ convention in San Francisco in the ‘70s, and

they asked numerous questions about diet and the like. It's quite something for a young teenage boy to sit in his underwear, being questioned by doctors in their long white lab coats about things like how many dairy products did I consume in a day... I'm telling this not so you'll feel sorry for me, but just to say that we all have things in our lives that we don't know why exactly they have happened, and apart from DNA and the like, we don't understand everything of what we go through. The scars from our past follow us and remind us of former times of pain, from which we have been healed. Thank God for the healing.

### Luke 17: 11-19

That's the theme of today's passage from Dr. Luke, who is the only one that records this particular trip or side trip of Jesus from Northern Israel on the way down to Jerusalem. Samaria is between Jerusalem and the Galilean north. Samaria was the place that good Jewish people avoided because they were filled with a religious cult, if you read the prophets in the Bible, a kind of mixture between the local gods and the LORD. You can read about it starting in 1 Kings 13, about how Rehoboam treated the people of Israel, and how the kingdom split north and south, with the north being ruled by Jeroboam, and how he re-introduced the worship of the golden calf, which was the sin that infected the people directly following the exodus from Egypt. The wild bull apparently was worshipped widely in the middle east in those days, being a symbol of fertility and strength. But I stray from the text on the question of the Samaritan, still a people group today, very small, considered a sect of Judaism.

But when it came to banding together ten men who had a serious illness, the dreaded leprosy, which is now called Hansen's disease, we find Jews and Samaritans together in spite of their differences. Leprosy is a bacterial infection that leads to neurological insensitivity in the skin, which then opens an individual to many bad wounds and deformities, since they are not felt. How it is transmitted to others is still not known today, according to the World Health Organization. But once you have it, you tend to seek out others who have the same affliction, and all of a sudden your exact theological beliefs don't matter as much. Such was the case with the Jews and Samaritans found together asking Jesus to heal them at a distance, like of 50 yards/meters.

Luke 17:13

Lepers were required by law to stay at a distance and shout, “Unclean!” to warn people. But to Jesus, they shouted, “Jesus, Master have pity on us!” This is a good prayer for us as well, here at Grace, in our homes, in our schools, in our city, our province, and in our country. Jesus has many ways of healing people. He touched some. Some touched him. He approached some. Some approached Him. He spoke over some. Others He simply declared clean or healed. He raised the dead. He vanquished the demonic.

Luke 17: 15-16

In this case, Jesus simply asks the lepers to go in faith to their priest(s) and do what the Law says to do, that is, to have the priest look at the lesions and declare the person clean or not, with a week of isolation after the declaration. Note that we don’t know the exact time frame for how long the ten were gone and the one came back. We just know the one came back and praised God in Jesus’ presence. In fact, Dr. Luke gives us the detail that this man alone came back and threw himself at Jesus’ feet, certainly an act of worship that we would be encouraged to follow, and thanked him. The Greek word translated “he thanked Him” is *eucharisteo* from which we get the word for communion, Eucharist. Thanksgiving.

This is the central point of Thanksgiving: worshipping and praising the Living God made known in Jesus Christ, healing us, bringing us to Himself. But we have a choice, just as the ten did. Ninety percent chose not to come back to Jesus. Some suggest these did not receive the full healing, as the one did. Jesus said to Him, “Rise and go, your faith has made you well.” He was the well one, never mind if he is a stranger or someone different. He came back to Jesus and gave himself to Jesus.

We don’t really know about what happened to the nine. We just hear about the one. And of course, we hear from this teaching from Jesus: Be like the one. Don’t be like the nine. Take time to find the gratitude. Take time to worship. Take time to praise Jesus. And again I ask you to take the time at your dinner table, with all the harvest before you, take a little time and ask, “What can we be grateful for, this year?” Let’s praise God together. We often do so in a prayer of grace before our meals. Let’s go a bit farther and share more, each one of us, even if it is a little awkward.

Our healing comes in the presence of Jesus, in our choices to follow Jesus, to praise Jesus, with all our gifts, with all of who we are. Note that it can be

the theologically correct who don't put Jesus first, but perhaps only what He can do for us.

Jesus wants to be more for us. Jesus wants to address not only our intellect, but our actions. He wants to correct more than our philosophies and ways of thinking, but our ways of living as well.

And so we together at Jesus' feet, with that cleansed leper. We marvel at what Jesus can do in our lives. We praise Jesus together, not only for the huge provision of food, clean water, heat, light and air that we have, but all the spiritual benefits that are ours, because Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, to the Cross. He encounters peoples from all people groups, from every walk of life, rich and poor, well and unwell, social and antisocial, all of us...

Let us continue to give thanks to the One who made us and loves us.  
Let us pray.