

“Would you say Thanks?”

Luke 17: 11-19

It seems a little odd this morning to be talking about thanksgiving. Usually we save that for November when we are all ready for turkey and a Thanksgiving feast. Or if we are honest, it seems the only other time the church pulls out this idea of “thanksgiving” is when we are having our conversation around stewardship time, you know those times, when we say things like, “We invite all to bring forth our tithes and offerings as sign of thanksgiving for all that God has done in our lives.” And then we ask everyone to fill out the pledge cards so that we can begin working on the budget for next year.

The church usually pulls out this idea of thanksgiving about two times a year: November and stewardship time. And we are nowhere near Thanksgiving, although the stores would have us thinking differently. And our budget time is in May, although, let me just say, if you want to give thanks to God today by sharing your tithes and offerings, I’m not going to stop you. In fact, if I had to guess, if you did just that, our Admin Team would do a little dance of glee.

Okay, back to the sermon. It’s October, October 9th, in fact. Not a particularly special day by any means in this country. Sure, in Canada, tomorrow is their

Thanksgiving Holiday but here, today, it seems a little odd to be talking about thanksgiving, especially where there is no turkey and dressing to follow. It seems a little odd to be talking about thanksgiving, especially with all the stuff going on in our world, things like violence and hate, things like hurricanes killing hundreds of people and leaving devastation in its wake. These things don't exactly inspire a sense of gratefulness in our world or in our hearts.

But as I spent time with this text this past week, I realized that was the whole point. This oddity of thanksgiving that we are invited to participate in as people of faith defies logic and makes no sense to the wider world. But to us, the ones who know that the presence of God is always there, surrounding us, guiding us, leading us, calling us to be lights of hope and love in the darkness, well, to us, it makes perfect sense. This thanksgiving to God which shapes our lives, which transforms our choices, making them life-giving and renewing rather than simply actions to be done out of habit, this thanksgiving to God makes perfect sense to us. Because as people of faith, we know that we have this oddity we call thanksgiving as a gift from our God. So that in times of darkness, our eyes can and will be opened to the beauty and wonder that surrounds us each and every day. This gift of thanksgiving transforms us, changes us, reorients us to the Kingdom of God in our midst and in doing so, helps us to remember from whom all our blessings flow.

Let me explain: As we take a look at this text from Luke, we discover that Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem. And on this journey, he encounters 10 lepers, 10 people who because of a skin disorder, a skin disease, have been pushed to the margins and declared unclean.

As Jesus approaches them, they call out to stay away. But he can't. Jesus doesn't. Jesus sees them. He sees them, not only as lepers but as people created in the image of God. Jesus sees them as ones who are in need of healing and wholeness in their lives. So after seeing them, after noticing them, Jesus then tells them to go show themselves to the priests.

Now here is another odd part to this text. Why is Jesus sending these lepers to the priest at this point? After all, they don't need the priests to tell them once again that they are unclean, to tell them once again that they are not welcome. Why on earth does Jesus do this?

As we wonder about this, we need to remember that this story follows up Jesus' conversation with the disciples about how that through this having faith as small as a mustard seed, worlds can be changed, hope can be restored and lives renewed.

So by having Jesus send the 10 lepers to the priest before they were even healed, Luke uses them as a teaching moment for the disciples and us as readers. They become illustrations of faith. In that moment, they could have easily said to

Jesus, “No Thanks. I’m good. I’ll wait right here” But they went in faith. They go in hope to the priest.

The amazing thing is they didn’t even have to make it to the priests before they discovered that they had been healed. All 10 lepers’ lives were changed. All 10 lepers were healed. All 10 lepers were transformed and welcomed back into the community but only one comes back to say thank you.

Now once again, let me stop right here and say as people of faith, we tend to give the 9 lepers who didn’t come back a raw deal. We try to create drama when there really isn’t anything there to begin with. The 9 did as Jesus said. They went to the priest and presented themselves and in doing so, they were healed. They showed that they had faith by following Jesus’s invitation. So in reality, they are great examples, models to follow. They had faith, even it was a small kernel of faith. Through it, they had more than enough faith to trust and hope that their world could and would change.

So if this story is not about faith...What is it really about?

Well like I said, as I lived with this text this past week, I kept coming back to this odd notion of thanksgiving. I realized that the odd thing isn’t necessarily the notion of thanksgiving in and of itself. What was odd to me was that I even thought

the response of thanksgiving to be odd in the first place when in reality, it is the only appropriate response. Lives had been changed. Bodies healed. The lost welcomed back. Of course, thanksgiving is and should be the only appropriate response. All 10 lepers' lives were changed. All 10 bodies were healed. All 10 were now part of the community once more. But only one came back to say thank you. Only one came back to give thanks. But only one remembered from whom all blessings flow. All 10 lives were changed. All 10 bodies healed but only one was told that he was saved.

In giving thanks, this one reminds that our faith is grounded not only in hope. It is also grounded in thanksgiving. It is grounded in the knowledge that God is God and we are not. Our faith get us in touch with the life transforming power of our God each and every day, a power that brings life and love to all.

So knowing all that, why are we surprised or even find it odd that Jesus asks the disciples, asks us, "If this had happened to you, wouldn't you come back and say thank you?"

Like as I said, as I have lived with this text, I was surprised and yes a little ashamed to admit it that I even found it odd to think that thanksgiving to be such an out of the ordinary reaction in the first place. That's why I knew that I found my answer. Because someone reminded me that we always have a choice. We have "a choice to see those blessings, name them, and express our gratitude in word and

deed. We have a choice to give voice to our gratitude, a choice with the consequences, for as we express our gratitude, we affect those around us, even shape the reality in which we live.

Think about it. Gratitude is not the only emotion we might choose to express in response to the events of any given day. There are reasons for gratitude, yes, and also reasons for fear, for anger, for frustration, grief, for regret, for apprehension. Each and all of these colors our experience, makes its appearance on the stage of our lives, and perhaps each has a place and role to play from time to time. But we *choose* how much stage time to grant each of these emotions by giving them expression, and as we do so we give them power in our lives. Let me say that again: whatever we give expression to in our lives, we give power to in our lives.

And that's what's key: Day in and day out 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. When confronted by someone who is angry, do we respond with anger as a form of self protection or do we choose empathy, trying to understand the emotions of the other, and gratitude that the person was willing to be honest? When we are set back in some endeavor at school or work, do we express frustration or a resolve to keep at it and gratitude for what we've learned through this setback? These are choices." (David Lose) These are the things we must decide if and when they have power in our lives.

Because, you see, Luke reminds us that sure all 10 were healed because of their faith. But only 1, the one who comes back, is told that he has been saved. Saved as in been made whole. Saved as in been made new. Saved as in truly gets what it means to live our lives always immersed in God's amazing grace.

This Leper made the choice to say thank you in response to God's amazing grace. Thank you in response to God's healing love. Thank you in response to God's continued presence that surrounded and made him whole.

And we have the same choice as well. We have the choice to wake up each day with gratitude or with fear. We have the choice to see the glass as half full or as half empty. As people of faith, we have the choice to see that even in times of darkness, God is there, loving us, guiding us, calling us and empowering us to be lights of hope that shine bright or we have the choice to believe that this world has the last word.

It is and has always been up to us.

Recently someone shared a story with me about a colleague of his. He said this colleague of his has been living with a form of incurable brain cancer. After much treatment and prayer, it has gone into what is called "partial remission" – it is not growing, but it cannot be removed. One day it will grow again and take his life. But not today. And he is not only grateful but also shares that gratitude. My

friend went on to say that he suspected that his colleague had moments where he feels bitter or resentful or fearful or any of the other range of emotions that would be completely understandable, but he chooses to live gratefully, viewing each day as another gift of grace and giving voice to his gratitude.

I suspect that not many of us have things as dramatic as this going on in our lives but maybe we do. Maybe the world seems so dark right now that we don't know which way to turn. If so, in the midst of this sermon on gratitude and thankfulness, this is what I want you to hear.

God is always there, guiding us, leading us, surrounding us, loving us. There is no place that we can go that our God is not already there. God is always there, waiting, inviting us to choose life. God is always there, reminding us from whom all blessings flow. God is always there, ready to continue reminding us that God is at work in the world, bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's children. No strings attached. No expectations of something in return. God is doing all of this because God loves us and wants us to be made whole. God is at work in this world, immersing all of God's creation in amazing grace. And all we need to do is say Thank you!

Today and all days, we are reminded that in giving thanks, in allowing grace to be the power that is at work in his life, the one leper had not only been healed. This one, the one who chose gratitude, who chose thanksgiving as the only

appropriate response to God's love and grace, this one had been transformed, eyes opened to the amazing possibilities of new life that surrounded him and enriched his life every single day. This one, the one that has been made whole and saved, this one, now understands that no matter what may come, the presence of God is the thing that centers us, is the thing that brings balance to our lives, is the one thing that will restore us to life each and every day.

Now not only has this leper been embraced and welcomed into the community once more, all because he had been healed. Now his vision had also been re-orientated to ways that God continues to work in this world to bring hope to all of God's children.

all because he made the choice to say Thank you to the one from whom all blessings flow.

May we always choose to see and name God's amazing grace as the power at work in our lives and in our world. Amen.