

Year C Proper 23  
Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7  
Psalm 66:1-12  
2 Timothy 2:8-15  
Luke 17:11-19

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Gratitude, thankfulness—one of the ten lepers showed this. Luke says, “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.” This man’s response to his healing was thanksgiving, and praising God. Let’s take a closer look.

For the last several weeks, we have seen Jesus spreading his message as he heads toward Jerusalem. Here, he and his disciples skirt around the edge of Samaria, going through Galilee. You’ll remember that Samaria was filled with Samaritans, who, while they worshiped the same God as the Jews, were reviled by them because they worshiped God on Mt. Gerasim, instead of the temple in Jerusalem, and they had, essentially, different liturgical practices. Jews did not associate with Samaritans, and they considered one another to be enemies. So placing this story where he did made it easy for Luke to reveal that one of the lepers was a Samaritan.

And leprosy, in biblical terms, was really a whole host of skin diseases. Almost anything that caused the skin to erupt, and didn’t go away by itself could be considered leprosy, because they had to be so careful not to infect one another. Lepers were therefore made to live on the margins of the community, and touching them made a person ritually unclean. Notice that the ten lepers approach Jesus, but they keep their distance. They know the rules. Leviticus 13:45 states, “The leprous person shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

Leviticus also specifies that the priests were the ones who were to examine people to determine whether they had leprosy or not. They are given very pages and pages of particular guidelines stating how they will know whether a person is “leprous” or not. For instance, Leviticus 13:10 states, “and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is raw flesh in the swelling, it is a chronic leprous disease.” So when Jesus tells the lepers to go show themselves to the priests, he is implying that they will be cured. “And as they went they **were** made clean.” You can imagine that all of them were glad, suddenly seeing their skin cleared of lesions, not experiencing the pain, or the itching can’t you? They all would have been happy, or amazed, or almost disbelieving. But **one** of them responds by turning back to Jesus, “praising God with a loud voice.”

Perhaps he burst into singing something from today’s Psalm 66: “Come and see what God has done:/ he is awesome in his deeds among mortals...Bless our God, O peoples,/ let the sound of his praises be heard.” Luke doesn’t tell us exactly what he said, but we do know that “He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.” The word in Greek for “thanks” here is *eucharisto*, which is also where we get our word Eucharist—which means thanksgiving or gratitude. Then, after showing us this man’s

gratitude, and that he understands Jesus as the source of God's healing grace, Luke tells us that this man "was a Samaritan." Once again, it is the outcast who understands who Jesus is, when the religious authorities do not, or will not.

Notice, though, that being grateful was not a requirement for this healing. The other lepers were healed, as well. But Jesus is perturbed that they were not grateful for their deliverance, because gratitude **is** the appropriate response to God's grace. "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 Jesus says something that I wish our translation translated differently. In our lectionary it says, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." But another, better translation could be, "your faith has *saved* you." Because this man's faith, his grateful prostration at Jesus' feet has produced his *salvation*. He understands that Jesus is the conduit through whom God's saving grace comes. This is not just about healing a skin disease, but about realizing who Jesus is. And in having faith in Jesus, the man is saved, not just made well. Many people who have prayed for healing, and read the words in this translation have wondered if they, or their loved one, had too little faith to be made well. And that is sad, because it's not the point here, at all. The emphasis here is that when we are given a gift by God, the response should be gratitude. When God gives to us out of Divine abundance, just like the Samaritan leper, we should give thanks to God.

And that's why gratitude is the entire posture of our liturgical worship. Notice how many times we thank God on a Sunday morning. As we move into the Eucharist today, think about what we are saying. When we sing the doxology, listen to what we're singing. Doxology means "praise." Today, especially, join me in praying the Eucharist—we call it our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving—as one bishop urged us, "be sure to pray the Eucharist, don't just say the Eucharist."

Then, when you go out into the world after the service, carry that praise and gratitude with you, and let it inform everything you do. Then your faith *will* save you. Amen

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