

November 21, 2021
Thanksgiving Sunday

Luke 17:11-19

“Please and Thank-you”

When you saw today’s sermon title you might have remembered the children’s song: *“We’re talkin’ bout please and thank-you, they’re called the magic the words. For nice things to happen their the words which must be heard...”* And that, I guess, is my fault. This is precisely the kind of finger wagging we want to avoid. Children sometimes need direct communication to get the point...and please and thank-you are important words - but if we don’t move into deeper waters we won’t hear what God has for us.

The setting Luke gives us for today’s story is the foreshadowing of things to come. Where did this happen? Somewhere in between Samaria and Galilee. A place with a culture impacted by people and history from both sides of the border – maybe a little like living in Michiana.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die for all of humanity – and these ten lepers – outcasts – people not allowed back in society – people with no social importance at all – interrupt him. We could look at it that way. Which might lead us *to reconsider* what we mean by the word, *“interruption.”*

Jesus sizes up the situation in a glance and offers the mercy requested. Some interpreters suggest that what the lepers were really doing was *asking Jesus for lunch money*. Imagine them at the end of the day thinking to themselves...all we wanted was some loose change he gave us our life back. Yet, what Jesus did was not intuitively obvious. Put yourself in the place of the lepers. You acknowledge him as Master – plead for mercy – and Jesus tells you to *do what you would do if you weren’t sick*. You look down at your discolored skin, the sores, the infection – you look at the person standing next to you whose face is disfigured and you don’t know what to think. Is he mocking us? Or, is he asking us to act on what we said when we asked for mercy? We are asked to trust the one we asked for help.

The only people who called Jesus master were the disciples. And it was understood that God gives mercy. So the lepers had given Jesus pretty high praise. Now he is asking them to act on it. Need can be a relentless driver and pain a powerful teacher. So they go. They look to him for help – and against all

odds do what he says. **That's faith. To look to God for life. To live being led by the one who offers us God's healing.**

Notice how Luke's narrative progresses from – there was one who came back to say “thank-you” to, “Oh, this role model – he was from a clan of people you despise.” Like Jesus first disciples, *we assume the people who will make the right choices are the right kind of people.* And for Jesus contemporaries Samaritans were anything but the right kind of people.

The Samaritan was right to be thankful. But in this story it is more important that he is a Samaritan. One who didn't make the grade either religiously or racially. His being the “wrong” kind of person helps us to know how we are grateful matters. Remember Jesus story of the religious leader who stood in the temple next to a tax collector and prayed – *“Thank-you God that I am not like him. Thank-you that I know better than he does how to live to please you.”* That's not really gratitude is it. More like arrogance.

To be truly grateful is to believe we have received a benefit without deserving it. Our Samaritan today experiences that. As we approach a national holiday dedicated to giving thanks – our text asks us if we do.

We don't need to be too hard on the nine who didn't come back – but we can learn from them. *They did what they were told.* Jesus said, “Show yourselves to the priests” – and they did. How can anyone fault them for that? The problem is, a life of faith isn't just about following the rules or doing what we are told. A life of faith is an active connection with God in which we have both guidance and participation – grace molds us into new people who act accordingly.

We can struggle to say “thank-you” when we have gotten used to any gift. It is a lot easier to feel the need to ask – *“Please sir, may I have more?”* Then it is, with a full belly, to say *“thank-you.”* The Samaritans “thank-you is based upon remembering *we are not the source of our own healing.* Life squeezes us in uncomfortable ways and we are right to say “please” when we ask for help. But the “thank-you” powerfully closes the loop and we receive grace without arrogance. May we learn in our heart of hearts that Please and thank-you are powerful words which connect us to God who gives life. May this experience be yours this year as you observe Thanksgiving.