

2020 10 11 – Living Thanksgiving

Luke 17:11-19

Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem and as he entered a village near the borders of Samaria and Galilee he was met by ten people with leprosy. When they met Jesus, these ten people kept their distance. This tells us that they had already been examined by the Jewish priests and labelled as “unclean” (see Lev. 13:1-8). The laws of Moses were clear. Those who were “unclean” were exiled from the village and forced to live separately from their families; they were not allowed to get close. (see Lev. 13:46).

These days we all know a little bit about exile, about living apart, about being separated from our extended families. In this time of COVID-19, physical distancing and self-isolation are common-place. Those of us who have been sick during the last few months know the feeling of being set apart. We have a small sense of what these ten people were going through.

The ten had obviously heard of Jesus’ reputation for healing, because they intentionally came to ask for his help. They shouted from a distance, “Jesus, Rabbi, have pity on us!” Jesus heard their request and knew they were asking for more than just his regard. He responded, “Go, and show yourselves to the priests.” Jesus understood the Jewish laws. He was sending them to be examined by the priests so that they could be declared “clean.” According to the scripture, they were healed on their way to the temple.

Imagine what that was like for those ten people! As they walked towards the temple, their lesions began to clear; they could see the healing taking place in front of their eyes. For the first time in weeks, or months or even years, they had some hope of normality; some hope of seeing and even hugging their families. Those of us who have recently been tested for COVID-19 and received a negative result may have some sense of the relief, the joy, the excitement that they experienced. Maybe you have gone into remission from cancer or had a successful surgery that has had allowed you to return to a more normal routine. This was an incredible moment for those ten people.

“One of them, realizing what had happened, came back praising God in a loud voice, then fell down at the foot of Jesus and spoke his praises. The individual was a Samaritan. Jesus replied, “Weren’t all ten made whole? Where are the other nine?” Was there no one to return and give thanks except this foreigner?”

Jesus had a good question. Where were the other nine? Maybe they were overwhelmed with the excitement of the moment. Maybe they were too focussed on getting to the temple, being declared clean and seeing their families. Maybe later they would reflect on that moment and be filled with gratitude. Maybe later they would attempt to connect with Jesus and express their thanks—maybe; maybe not. We don’t really know, do we?

It’s easy for me to think of times in my life when I have been negligent in expressing my thanks. I could blame the excitement of the moment, the busyness of my days, or the shortness of my memory. I have a box filled with

thank-you cards that were never sent, expressions of gratitude that were never written. Even with the best of intentions it's easy to let life go by without saying "thank you."

Jesus said to the Samaritan, "Stand up and go your way, your faith has saved you." The Samaritan was not only healed of his leprosy; he was also saved. The word that has been translated as "saved" in this passage can also mean "healed" or "made whole." The healing that took place in the life of the Samaritan that day was much more than just a cleansing of skin. Salvation is about becoming what God intended us to be. When we are saved, we are brought into right relationship with ourselves and with the Ground of our Being, the Holy Mystery, the Source of Life.

What was different about this Samaritan, why was he the only one that was saved? First, the Samaritan realized what had happened. He realized that through Jesus, he had just been healed by the power of the Holy Spirit. So often we don't even recognize when blessings occur in our lives. When things are going well, it's easy to pat ourselves on the back and forget all the reasons why life is good. It's easy to forget all the people who have given us a step-up along the way. It's easy to forget the blessings of life itself and all the gifts that God has given us. Similarly when things are not going well, when life is hard and pain is constant, it's easy to focus on the negative and not be able to see the blessings that still remain in our lives. Noticing grace, seeing goodness, paying attention to healing, and stopping long enough to take in blessing, that is the first step in becoming ourselves, the people God intended us to be.

Second, the Samaritan came back, praising God in a loud voice. Once we recognize our blessings, the next step is to express our gratitude through our words and actions, to live our thanksgiving. Thanks can be expressed in so many ways: face to face, through the written word, through prayer, through song, through action. One wonderful way to express our gratitude is by giving, giving of our time, our talents or our money in ways that can help others.

This is Thanksgiving Sunday and tomorrow is a statutory holiday focussed on the idea of gratitude. It happens at this time of year because, here in Canada, our harvest takes place in the late summer and fall. So each year we take a day to feast and give thanks for the harvest that will sustain us through the coming winter. But is also a time to remember all the other reasons we have for practicing gratitude, for living Thanksgiving,

One of the most amazing things about gratitude is that is available to us at every moment. This life-saving emotion is available to us in every season of the year and at every stage of our lives.

Today I invited each one of you to bring a picture or an object that signified something in your life for which you are grateful. I invite now to take that picture or object in your hands or to bring whatever it is into your mind and then express your gratitude to God. I invite you to say a life-changing, "Thank you."

Amen.