

The Grateful Samaritan

Luke 17: 11-19

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On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. 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. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “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 he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

So, I’ve got a question for you today. What is the difference between happiness and gratitude? According to [vocabulary.com](http://vocabulary.com), my source and authority this morning, happiness is that feeling that comes over you when you know life is good and you can’t help but smile.

Happiness is a sense of wellbeing, joy or contentment. When people are successful or safe or lucky, that is when they feel happy.

Okay; is anyone here today feeling happy? Anyone ready to break out into singing? “Zippity doo dah, zippity-a...my, oh my, what a wonderful day. Maybe not. You’re happy cause you got that promotion, you’re safe on third...the test results are all negative...and you’re happy because you finally mustered the courage to ask her out to dinner and she finally said, Yes! Happiness is a good thing. Even fools can be happy. But gratitude is something different.

Both happiness and gratitude can be defined as feelings, emotions. You can’t just think your way into being grateful, you have to feel it. It’s like holding a

mug of hot, mulled cider on a cold, chilly day and as you take a big sip you just feel that warmth that goes right down inside of you and spreads out. That's the way gratitude works. Gratitude is an emotion.

But where happiness is a feeling of general feeling of wellbeing, gratitude is a feeling of good will, of appreciation leading to the desire (which is also an emotion) to do something in return...to respond to the source of your gratitude.

The difference between being happy and being grateful is that the latter feeling, gratitude, must be directed toward something...or someone. I am grateful for, I am grateful to...there's just not something. This is not a generalized feeling of gratitude; it doesn't work that way. There has to be a source and a cause for our gratitude.

For example, you wake up, it's a warm, sunny day. You feel happy. Number 2, you wake up and it's a warm, happy day and you feel grateful to the one who provided you with that warm, sunny, happy day. And therein lies all the difference.

Gratitude can be described as an emotion. It can also be described as a state of mind...a mood. You remember Robert Schuller who wrote the book, *The BE Attitudes*. He talked about the attitude of gratitude. When we have an attitude of gratitude, we are more apt to find reasons to be grateful, in all things great and small as we go about our living. But when we don't have that attitude, then less likely to see or appreciate those things.

Finally, gratitude can be described as a trait of character, as part of someone's personality. Look at the prayer in your bulletin by George Herbert, Lord, you have blessed me with so much; give me one more...a grateful heart whose very pulse may be Your praise. Now, that's a trait of gratitude. That's where I want to be; that's what I'm working on.

In the Bible, gratitude has a lot to do with grace which is, after all, a gratuity. A gratuity is a free gift. It's not obligated, it cannot be earned, it's not wages.

It's something that kindles our desire to do something in return. Our commitment to offer something in return. That's how gratitude works.

And, gratitude, by way of contrast, is the way when a person feels nothing after having received something of worth or value or beauty. There is no feeling of warm appreciation, there is no feeling at all. It's as if you were holding that hot mug of mulled cider on a chilly day and you can't feel it. Your fingers are numb. You don't know what you're holding.

That's how leprosy works by the way. Leprosy is the disease that takes away your body's ability to feel, bit by bit, progressively. That's why you begin to lose your finger tips and your nose because you can't feel anything.

Ingratitude is a form of spiritual leprosy.

John Calvin connected ingratitude to disease. This is what he says, "It is too common a disease that when we are urged by strong necessity we seek God but when we have attained our wishes, ungrateful selfishness swallows up that feeling of piety." Calvin continues, "Thus poverty and hunger beget faith but abundance kills it."

Children begin their lives with an innate sense of gratitude and generosity. It is innate in children, it is. It takes them about four weeks to smile back at us and we see the joy in them, and we see the spontaneity in them where they remain in love and for love. They were created, as is each one of us, in love in that we might love in return. We might love others and we might love God and we might learn even to love ourselves. That's why we're here.

And like generosity, gratitude is a part of loving. But, in gratitude, like leprosy, it cripples and disfigures us. It disfigures us spiritually from within.

So, let's look at the story of the ten lepers. I love this story from Luke. We find Jesus traveling with his company. He's on his way to Jerusalem. He's finishing his ministry in Galilee. He's turning his face like flint, as it says in Mark, to Jerusalem, to his cross. He knows what is awaiting him. And he is

traveling on the southern border of Galilee where it comes up next to Samaria, with Jerusalem to the south and Galilee to the north, a sort of no-man's land.

Samaria used to be Jewish. It fell in 722BC to the Assyrians and they deported all the Jews out of that area, resettled them up in Iraq. They brought down other people and put them into that area which is now Samaria. So they were foreigners and the Jews regarded them as foreigners even though they purported to worship the same God and use much of the same scriptures of the Old Testament. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? They were the others, they were the despised Samaritans. We have the story of the Good Samaritan, this is the story of the grateful one.

So Jesus and his company are traveling now along the border and they come to a village. We don't know if it's a Jewish village or a Samaritan village but what we do know is that outside the village is a group of lepers. And ten of them approach from afar and they call out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." And this is where the law of God kicks in. According to the law of God in Leviticus, chapter 13 and 14, if you contract leprosy, which is highly contagious. by law you must separate yourself from society. You must dwell outside the camp. You cannot live with others in the village. So these people tend to live outside the villages, in huts, gathered in tents, in great poverty, dependent on the charity of the villagers.

But they could not enter in so as he's coming up to the village, here is this group of lepers, ten of them, that is a significant number. They call out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Clearly they knew who he was. They had heard of him by reputation. In the gospel of Mark, chapter 1, Jesus, at the very beginning of his ministry, heals a leper. He actually touches the leper, the unclean leper and says, "I will heal you. Get up and be clean but don't tell anyone about it. Well, the leper went off and he told everybody about it. That word had gotten out. These lepers knew of Jesus' power to heal. They should have called him Teacher, Rabbi, cause that's what he was but they called him Master.

In the book of Kings, chapter 5, we find the name of a Syrian who has leprosy and he comes to Israel because he has heard of the prophet Elisha who has power to heal. He knocks on Elisha's door, calls him to come out to heal him of leprosy. Elisha doesn't even answer the door. He just says, "Send the guy to the river. Tell him to wash 7 times. He'll be clean."

Well, Jesus doesn't even touch these ten lepers. He doesn't do anything other than say, "Go and show yourself to the priests." And they do. They went. So all ten of them had a level of hope and trust in Jesus. They knew that he could heal, they called him Master, he said Go, they went...all ten. So there was some measure of faith there. And, as they went they were made clean. They didn't even get to the priest yet.

In the book of Leviticus, when you have leprosy, you have to live apart from the people. You have to wear torn clothes. You have to wear your hair long and disheveled. You have to call out, "Unclean, unclean" when any normal person comes within 100 feet of you. It's the law, you have to do that. And if you think you have been cured, first you have to go to the priest. The priest examines you, cuts off all your hair, holds you for 8 days, washes you with water and blood (think of 1 John), sacrifices a lamb for your sin (think of the lamb of God), anoints you with oil (think of the christening). And all that has to happen first, before you can be pronounced clean. But, in this story, Jesus says, "Go." And as they go, in faith and in hope, they were made clean. They needed no priest. All they needed was Jesus, our High Priest.

And now the story gets personal. One of the ten, realizing that he had been made clean, stops and returns to Jesus. You know the word return and repent are one and the same in Greek. Repent means to turn around, to turn back. You might say that the 10<sup>th</sup> leper repented into praise and thanksgiving. He turns around and goes back, praising God with a loud voice and when he gets to Jesus, what does he do? He prostrates himself at Jesus' feet which is the position of worship. Why? Because he understands that the power of God is at

work in this man, the Master. And he worships him for who he truly is...the Messiah, the Son of God.

And Jesus says, “Were not nine others healed? Where are they? Indeed, where are they? And this man was a Samaritan. Why would Luke say these things to us? If not us, back then it would have been the Jews and us today might be the church. Why might he say this to us? That we might just presume to be the right people. And yet, the Samaritan is doing the right thing. He’s thanking God, he’s grateful. The last thing that Jesus says to him is, “Get up, go on your way. “Sesoken.” “Your faith has made you well.”

The word Sesoken comes from Sózó in the Greek which means, “to save, rescue, deliver, cure, to make whole, to make well.” It’s the same word that the New Testament uses for salvation. Sózó, to be healed, to be made whole, to be saved, to be delivered.

In the Old Testament, the word for salvation means “to be made whole.” I like the King James version of this text because it says “Arise, they faith hath made thee whole.” Sózós is never used for only a part of a person. It is used for the whole person. And when we talk about what saves us, which is the love of God and Jesus Christ, can we really leave gratitude out of that?

Our faith isn’t complete without gratitude. And gratitude requires a relationship, a relationship with the source and cause of what we are grateful for. We can sing *Zippity doo dah, what a wonderful day*. But that’s very different from saying “Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful day that you have given us.”

Gratitude is actually the beginning of our salvation. And that’s what I want to leave you with this morning. When we choose to be grateful, when we respond to life no matter what it throws at us, with gratitude, there is a saving and a healing that takes place in us and makes us whole. Whether outwardly we might be maimed or blind, or sick or dying...that doesn’t matter. It’s

inward that matters. We are grateful, grateful to God. And when we understand our gratitude in Jesus Christ, it becomes a saving gratitude for us.

There's a poet named Hondo Crouch from Luckenbach, Texas. In the inimitable words of Hondo Crouch who understood gratitude. He said, "Some folks wake up and say 'Another day.' I wake up and say 'There she is again.' There it is. I get down on my knees and I pat the ground and I say, 'God, you done it again! God, you done good. Thank you, Feller...Friend.'"