

Sharing Thanks

Luke 17:11-19

Whitefish UMC

October 10, 2010

- † You must admit that it was quite a day for the ten lepers Jesus encountered on his way that day. One moment covered with visible signs of a dreaded disease, outcasts all—the other moment clean and whole and restored. Don't you wonder what was going on in their minds as they realized that they actually had been healed?
- † Luke says that, keeping their distance, (they had to keep their distance under the purity codes) they cried out saying: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Did they know something that others didn't about who Jesus was?
- † Although we'd like to think that they did, the truth is they were used to begging for mercy from just about anyone that they met. For that was the only way they could receive food or money or anything they needed to survive. Did they expect Jesus to really heal them? Probably not.
- † But he did heal them. And what was their response? Michael Lindvall says that this story “implies two fundamental ways of being in this world: one assumes that my life and all that fills my life is simply what I am more or less entitled to. You can only guess that those nine lepers who disappeared without so much as a ‘Thank you, Sir’ honestly felt that good health was their right [and had been a long time coming]. It's not gift. They simply had what was coming to them....

- † The Samaritan leper who returns and drops to his knees before Jesus is a living emblem of the other demeanor toward being. His thankfulness is actually a life stance, a fundamental attitude that says... ‘Here I am, alive and whole. I might never have been, but here I am. I did nothing to deserve life. It’s a gift; it’s grace.’”
- † Now most of us don’t live completely in either one or the other of these ways of being. Sometimes we remember to be grateful, and at other times we become consumed by whether life treats us fairly and we get what we deserve.
- † Henry Ward Beecher, the nineteenth century American preacher, employed a wonderful image to describe what it means to live the life of gratitude:
- † "Suppose someone gave you a dish of sand mixed with fine iron filings. You look for the filings with your eyes; you comb for them with your fingers. But you can't find them. Then you take a tiny magnet and draw it through the dish. Suddenly the magnet is covered with iron filings. The ungrateful person is like our hands combing the sand. Such a person finds nothing to be thankful for. The grateful person, on the other hand, is like the magnet sweeping through the sand; that person finds hundreds of things to be thankful for."
- † “The recognition of grace is not a matter of how much one has. We have all known people who had almost everything they could ever want or need, and yet lived with some great emptiness; and we have known others who seemed to have less than a little, whose lives nonetheless demonstrated a remarkable peace and contentment and fullness.” (Dunham)
- † Ten lepers, ten healings. Ten lepers obey Jesus and head to the temple to let the priests see what he has done and proclaim the ten clean so that they can

be restored to their communities. But along the way, one of them, a Samaritan, doubly outcast, turns around to say thanks. Don't you wonder what made him different from the others, made him remember to say thank-you? Was it just good manners or something else?

- † I think the grateful Samaritan responded not just with his words but with his heart. I suspect he divided his life into a before healing and after healing part. It wasn't just that he had been healed—it was what he did with his experience of healing. I suspect he lived and felt and saw and heard differently, aware of what God had done.
- † Luke often makes the point that it is sometimes the outsiders who understand better the power of grace. He wants us to be more like them, and not keep them at a proverbial distance. He singles out the thankful Samaritan to help us see what we are missing.
- † He wants us to see how much we have been blessed by the healing of our lives that Jesus offers us and that we receive, if we are paying attention. And he wants us to live out of that awareness of what a difference it makes in us and can make in our world.
- † Today we begin our three week stewardship and mission focus for this year—discovering joy through simplicity and generosity. We mean for it to be a time of celebration—a reflection of who we are, and whose we are and how much God has blessed us—and an invitation to respond generously.
- † Yes, the church needs money to do its work; yes, it is helpful to know something about our anticipated financial support going into a new year. Yes, financial commitments by members and friends are important.
- † But even more important than what the church gets out of this is what we—you and I—get. We get to live grateful lives. We get to consider how much we've been given. We get an invitation to feel—really feel—what the tenth

leper, the healed Samaritan, felt as he turned back to Jesus to say thank you and offer praise to God for his transformed and new life.

- † We get to experience that overwhelming feeling of thankfulness, and, as it all unfolds, we get an opportunity to consider how we want to respond to it. But first, always first, comes the awareness and the gratitude and the praise.
- † Paul Duke once said that praise is the “jazz factor” of faith. Praise is love improvising its answer to love. Isn’t that what happened that day on the road between Samaria and Galilee? The ten lepers started out simply following the notes of what Jesus told them to do, but the tenth leper heard more—and his heart turned him back to Jesus to improvise his jazz of praise.
- † In the bulletin today, you will find a bright red insert. It is simple—just an invitation to keep a list of things for which you are grateful. I suggest you make a list of three things for which you are grateful, three people for whom you are grateful, and three events that have touched your life.
- † Do it alone. Do it as a family—but just do it sometime this week. Nobody will check up on you. It is simply an opportunity for a “jazz factor” moment—a moment of praise and thanksgiving.
- † And it is a powerful reminder that good stewardship, becoming good stewards, always begins with gratitude, with remembering who we are and how much we have been given.
- † A year ago, someone sent me a Pickles cartoon from the newspaper. Little Nelson was standing by his mother or grandmother. She was watering a plant as she asked: “What do you want to be for Halloween this year, Nelson?” Nelson replied, “God.”
- † Surprised, she said, “God? Why on earth would you want to be God for Halloween?” His answer? “Cause I like Him. And I think maybe it will make people give me a tenth of all their candy.”

- † Of course the thing that Nelson doesn't quite understand is that while tithing means we return a tenth to God, it all begins with noticing that all the candy came from God in the first place.
- † Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "Only they who give thanks for the little things receive the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts he has in store for us because we do not give thanks for daily gifts."
- † This week, begin by sharing thanks. Tonight, as you lie in bed, imagine that you, like the Samaritan, have fallen in thanksgiving at the feet of Jesus. And then when you wake up, before arising, and in the same Spirit and by the same Spirit, remember to give thanks for God's presence with you through all the things that lie ahead. Cultivating a life of gratitude can be that simple.
- † Let us sing together, "Give Thanks."
- † Amen.

Sources:

Rev. Marianne Niesen, <http://www.stpaulshelena.org>

Linda Loving, "Whole and Thankful," <http://www.csec/sermon>

Robert Dunham, "Improvisational Gratitude," <http://day1.org>