

Sermon Text: Luke 17: 11-19

Sermon Theme: What does thankfulness look like?

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Back when we lived in Michigan, my family and I lived right on the edge of town. By the edge of town, I mean that there was our house and yard and then there was a forest.

This forest provided a pleasant backdrop to our backyard with many beautiful trees, flowers, and a lot of wildlife.

The one time that this forest became a problem was in the fall. In Michigan, you understand the word fall is not a word that describes the season as much as it describes the weather with the rains falling, the temperature with the drop in warmth and the leaves, which fall from the trees.

Every fall raking and moving leaves was a huge task that took not just one weekend, but many weekends. If you started too early, you would have the same amount of leaves the next day. If you started too late, you would have wet heavy leaves from the rain or snow that were much harder to move.

Every year, every free moment was used raking and hauling and then raking and hauling some more.

Except for that one year. One year, one of the student’s fathers offered to bring his lawn mower over to take care of the leaves for me. When he showed up he had one of those big lawn tractors. It had a huge vacuum attachment. He zoomed around the yard and had all the leaves picked up in 30 min. Not only did he do it that day, he came back and did a second round the next week.

You can guess that I was thankful. Of course I thanked him when he was working. But it was one of those things that thanks is just not enough. I asked if I could give him something for his help. Of course, he said no. I saw him at school a few days later and asked if I could give him a token of my thankfulness. I think I asked one more time. Finally, I asked his wife what could be a token of my thanks. She let me know. I went over to his house one day with my gift and left it on his doorstep with a note of thanks.

He was very touched by that extra sign of thanks.

There are certainly times that thank-you expresses our thanks well enough, but what do you do when a simple thank you isn’t good enough? What do you do when someone does something for you that just blows you away? How do you show you are thankful? Do you look for a gift? Do you take them out to eat? Do you look for a way to return the favor? What does your true thankfulness look like?

In the Word of God before us this morning, we will take a look at that question, what does my thankfulness to God look like?

This lesson of the 10 lepers is one that we know very well. Leprosy was a death sentence both literally and figuratively. Leprosy often led to death. Yet, it was not a quick death. A person could live with leprosy for many years. It could take a long time before they would die from complication surrounding the disease.

Their normal lives were also over. Because the disease was feared, anyone who had anything resembling leprosy was sent to special colonies far away from their family and friends. There they would live out their lives in suffering.

As Jesus was traveling through the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee, 10 men with leprosy came from their encampment and called out to him. **“Jesus, Master have pity on us!”**

There were many precautions that were taken for one with leprosy. We already talked about the leper colonies. There were others. If a person happened upon a leper, they were announce long before the person came near to them that they were a leper. If a person heard, **“Unclean! Unclean!”** they would give wide berth to that person. Much more when they heard, **“Unclean! Leprosy!”**

These men have some touch with religion. They call from a distance, asking that the Master, Jesus might heal them.

Jesus response to them does not seem to announce a miracle. **“Go show yourself to the priests.”** Medicine could not treat leprosy, but every now and again someone who had been sent to the leper colony got better. Maybe it wasn't leprosy to begin with, or maybe their body just miraculously healed. In these times, the leper was supposed to go present themselves to the priests to be examined and declared healed. It was only with this declaration that they could return to their lives.

We see their faith once again when they don't head back to the leper colony, rather they go the priests. It is by faith that they go. If you look at verse 14 which has Jesus command in it, when were they healed? They left in faith because they were not healed when Jesus said go, they were healed as they went on their way to the priest.

What did their thankfulness look like? Certainly they were thankful to Jesus for what he had done, but did they show it in the right way with the right people. I'm sure the families of these men saw their joy and happiness, but their thankfulness to Jesus? I'm sure the people in the temple could see their joy and happiness, but what about their thankfulness? They missed one thing that was really important. Only one man came back and thanked the source of his healing.

Jesus points out that the one man who returned was not the one that was expected. The Samaritan not only had faith, but put his faith into action by returning, dropping to his knees and praising and thanking his Savior.

We are caught in the disease of sin. Our lives are stained with sins just as much as the leper's body would be marked by the disease. When God looks at us, he should see the wretchedness of sin marking us, just as much as the disease marked the lepers.

He should see our sins clinging to us causing us to be unworthy to stand in his presence. Because of our sin, we should be sent far away to live apart from God because our sins separate us from our God. When we hear in the liturgy or after Communion, **Go in peace, your sins are forgiven.** We often take them for granted. Those words don't sound like a great miracle taking place any more than, **Go and show yourself to the priest** did for these men. Yet, the miracle that we have received, that is poured out on us every day is a miracle that is so much greater than being healed of leprosy.

Yet, in a much more miraculous way, Jesus came to earth to take that disease of sin away. Jesus came to be the healing which would remove our sin from us. Jesus washed us with much more than soap and water, Jesus washed us clean from the stain and disease of sin with his own blood. He brought us from that place that was so far away from God, into a close loving relationship with our loving heavenly Father. When God looks at us, he no longer sees a man who is not worthy of be in his house, he does not see a sin-sick, sin stained sould. Through Jesus he sees one who is dressed in the robes of righteousness through Jesus alone. We are no longer unclean and unworthy, we are made children and heirs of eternal life through Jesus.

What does our thanks to God look like? How do we come rushing back, fall at his feet and praise him for his goodness and love to us?

There are many ways to do that. In our readings this morning we have already seen a number of ways to put our thanks into action. The Apostle Paul tells us one of the ways to show our faith is to be in the Word so often that it dwells in us richly. Then, he tells us to do something with those riches of the glory of God. He tells us that whatever we do, we do it to God's glory and to praise God.

King David and Isaiah are other examples of what thankfulness to God looks like.

Isaiah is an example of praising and thanking God when we do things that are difficult. God asked Isaiah to do something difficult. Isaiah was terrified when he heard the call of the Lord, yet, he heard and answered that call to be God's prophet to share God's Word with his people. When Isaiah was preaching and teaching the Word of the Lord, it was not always easy for him to do. Yet, he put his thanks into action by being willing to have God take him by the hand and lead him where he needed to go.

Sometimes the Lord asked us to show thanks to him by being humble and doing everything we can to make sure the plans of others succeed .

There was one thing that David wanted to do to praise and thank God at the end of his life. He wrote Psalms about it, he made plans for it. David was sure that he would build a temple to praise and thank God for his goodness and mercy. Yet, God told King David he could not build the temple. David could have been upset

with God. He could have said to himself, “This is the only way I know how to serve and thank God and if I can’t do it, I won’t do anything.” Yet, that would not have been thankfulness to God for his love and mercy.

Instead, David set aside his pride and made sure that God’s plan flourished even though it was not his plan. David put his thanks into action by making every preparation he could to make sure that when the temple was built by Solomon that it succeeded.

Sometimes the thanks that we show to God are easy for us. Sometimes it is so simple to see that our gifts are needed here or there, yet, at others times, our thanks to God may be that he asks us to do something for him that is difficult for us. He might ask us to show thankfulness in ways that help the plans of others and not our own.

Our thanks need to flow from faith

no matter what they are. May we never limit our thankfulness to God because of earthly troubles or our own pride or selfishness. May we always see the great blessing of a Savior who has taken us from death in sin to life with him and may we, like the Samaritan, fall on our knees and be willing to thank God with everything we have. That is what true thankfulness looks like.