

Sermon on Luke 17:11-19
18th Sunday after Pentecost, October 13, 2019
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

I am going to begin by asking you a personal question. (Tension mounts!) *How many times per day do you say “Thank you”?* It’s not like “one a day” (like a vitamin) is adequate! How many times? Think about it. Perhaps you say thank you to a family member in the morning, when they pour you a cup of coffee, make your breakfast, or hand you a lunch to take to school or work. Thank you, honey! Perhaps you say a prayer of thanks to God three times a day, silently or out loud, as you bow your head before a meal. Thank you God, for the food we eat! Perhaps on your way to work you make a green light, instead of red, and say, under your breath, “Thank you Jesus” for not being late! Maybe somebody opens a door for you when you reach your destination, and you say “Thank you!” You go to the store to purchase some groceries, and when you pay the cashier, you say, “Thank you!” Maybe he or she thanks you as well. Then someone serves you a fine meal which you really enjoyed, and you say “Thank you!” So how many times a day do you say thank you to other people? Once? Twice? Ten times? Twenty or more? I hope there isn’t any day when you miss out on saying “Thank you!” to someone! And how many times do you thank God? Once? Twice? Three times? Ever?

Today’s scripture lessons are all about saying “Thank you” to God for healing, for forgiveness, for mercy and love, no matter what! Today’s texts encourage you and me to have what Karoline Lewis calls “An Attitude of Gratitude” – to God as well as other human beings, for all that we receive each day – for life itself, health, food and clothing, everything we need from day to day, with thanksgiving for all that God gives us freely, out of love. Then to thank God in the most meaningful way: showing love and mercy to other human beings, no matter who they are!

In the gospel of Luke we heard a familiar story of Jesus, on the way to Jerusalem through the region between Samaria and Galilee, when ten lepers approached him. Leprosy was a skin disease greatly feared in the ancient world, which often led to disfigurement and the loss of limbs, keeping people quarantined in leper colonies or communities outside a city’s walls. So these ten lepers kept their distance from Jesus, as was their custom, and called out to him, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” They must have heard of the power Jesus had to heal diseases, and that unlike other religious leaders, was not afraid to approach people who were sick or outcasts. So they tried their luck, and asked Jesus for mercy. What did they have to lose? So here’s the surprise: Jesus didn’t “do anything”!

Jesus saw them, and just said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” (For it was the task of priests to both diagnose whether someone truly had leprosy, and pronounce them unclean and quarantined, and then to examine someone who was healed, and pronounce them “clean” – able to rejoin the community. Was that it? Just go to the priests? Whatever. So they turned and left to go to the priest’s house, and suddenly, on the way, each one of them was made clean. They found themselves healed, the skin lesions had disappeared! So they must have run even faster to the priest’s house, to get themselves absolved! But they were so excited,, that they didn’t turn around to say “thank you” to Jesus.

Except for one, who was a Samaritan – one of those outsiders who was excluded because he wasn’t in the same religious group as the others. He, alone, saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God. He bowed down at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. But weren’t ten made clean? Only one, the Samaritan, gave thanks? Where were the others? Well, they were all made clean; all were healed. So Jesus told the Samaritan to get up, go on his way, “your faith has saved you!” Now he had been made whole, not only healed of his disease as his comrades also were, but that and his faith had made him whole. Salvation had come to him, through faith, thanks be to God!

It is crucial to point out one thing here that often makes us confused. All ten of the lepers were healed by Jesus, with the power of God – it was out of his compassion and mercy that their diseases were healed. Faith didn’t bring the healing, God’s mercy did. So no amount of faith, large or small, brings healing. However, when the leper who was a Samaritan returned to praise God and thank Jesus, the Lord said to the Samaritan “YOUR FAITH has made you well – it has made you whole. God’s healing, PLUS your faith, has saved you! It has restored you to community, made you “clean”, and renewed your life once more! For all of that, we can join the Samaritan in saying “Thanks be to God!”

And now there is this other story, from the Old Testament, about a general who was called Namaan, who served the army of Aram (which is the old name for Syria). A story about a Syrian general, when Syria is so much in the news this week – who says God doesn’t have a sense of humor, and that the Bible isn’t relevant?! I won’t retell the story, but Namaan was a great warrior, who also had a weakness: he suffered from leprosy. He wanted to be healed, but no amount of money, power or royal alliances could cure him. Long story short, by the advice of an Israelite slave-girl whom he had captured for his house, he learned that a prophet of God named Elisha had the power to cure him. So Namaan went to Elisha with a letter from the Syrian king to seek healing. Elisha wouldn’t see him. But he told him to just wash himself seven times in the Jordan River. Why not one of the rivers in Syria, near Damascus, much bigger and closer to him? Namaan wasn’t having it. But his servants talked him into just giving it a try. So Namaan

washed in the Jordan, and SURE ENOUGH, HIS SKIN WAS RESTORED! He was healed! His skin looked as smooth as a young boy's!

The lesson from the story? Naaman, a foreigner, a powerful Syrian general, now publicly gave witness that "There is no God in all the earth except in the God of Elisha and the people of Israel." No amount of power or money could "buy" his healing, only the power of God, and the waters of healing chosen by God!

So we sing with the psalmist today: *"Hallelujah! We give thanks to the Lord with our whole heart! Great are the works of the Lord! You have shown your people the power of your works! They are faithfulness and justice and stand forever and ever! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who practice this have a good understanding. God's praise endures forever! Amen!"*

So I am going to take a leap here from the healing waters of the Jordan to the cleansing power of water and God's Word for us today - in baptism - which gives you and me healing and new life through faith, whether it is in a river, a lake, or a simple baptismal font. For it is not about the "amount" of water that gives baptism its power, but water with God's Word, and by God's command! In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther said,

"Baptism brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems us from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare: that the one who believes and is baptized will be saved." How can water do such great things? "Clearly the water does not do it, but the word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. And so Paul says in Romans 8: "We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

So we are rightly thankful to God for the new life we have been given, for the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. We come today to praise God with our worship, our songs and hymns, and pray that we may have the strength to serve God as witnesses to this grace in which we live. Today I give thanks for the gift of life that Kim and I have been given in our children, in our extended family, and now in our new, beloved grandchild named Aubrey Jean. We are so thankful that we have been blessed with her new life, that she has a loving family around her to care for her, of which we are a part. We are thankful for this community of faith, and all faithful and loving people in this church, this community, and all the faithful people and congregations that surround us with God's love. We are

thankful for the love by which God makes Aubrey a part of the whole Body of Christ, people of faith throughout the world, through which we can serve God and love one another as one people, one Church.

For what else are you thankful today, and how can you and I express our gratitude and praise? Maybe it is to live another day, despite the cold and the rain! You can make your own list in your mind, or you could write them down, or share them with your neighbor. . . . Our best response of faith is to return to God in thanksgiving to offer our praise in worship. You and I can offer our own gifts of love, our kind words, our good works, and our treasure to financially support the work of the Church – to make God’s work, our hands a reality! If we are grateful for this Church we will support this ministry so that God’s work will continue in the years ahead. The words of our offertory prayer express these ways as thanks for all we have received from God’s hand! It is good to say them, and to teach them to our children!

So what have we learned today from the gospel? We have learned that God is gracious and merciful, and out of compassion reaches out to all of us with healing, forgiveness and mercy. He does this whether we are faithful or not, and shows mercy to all God’s children throughout the world, whatever they believe. It is our sin, however, that comes in the way. So we pray for the faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit, that will lead us to give thanks out of gratitude for all we have received. We pray that we may learn to love God with all our hearts, and then love our neighbors as ourselves, as Jesus commands us. Let’s make *gratitude to God and neighbor our way of life!* Thanks for listening! And thanks be to God! Amen.

You call us to love our neighbor, protect the foreigner, and welcome immigrants and refugees. Protect the Kurdish people in Syria who have been attacked by the Turkish army, make safe the many civilians who have fled their homes and are in danger of ethnic cleansing. We pray that our leaders repent of this betrayal of the Kurdish people, and return to bring peace and protection to all who are in danger. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**