

## Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

### Luke 17:11-19

<sup>11</sup>On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup>As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup>they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup>When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup>Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup>He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup>Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" <sup>18</sup>Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup>Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

What are you thankful for? If you made a list, what would make the top 5? My list changes from week to week, depending on what is happening in my life, but right now it includes:

- 1) My beloved and supportive family
- 2) The beauty of the natural world
- 3) The joy and innocence of children, like my niece and nephew and every single child running around the advent event last night, covered in glitter and buzzing with excitement about the approach of Christmastime.
- 4) Food- for the ability to pull sustenance from the earth and transform it into delicious, savory, mouth watering meals, and especially for chocolate and coffee, that which employs my husband and also makes life worth living.
- 5) All of you – for work that is fulfilling, for gifted colleagues, for talented parishioners who encourage and accompany me as I grow into my pastoral voice.

This time of year, despite our city's headlong rush into Christmas, gratitude is at the forefront of our minds. On Thursday, we will celebrate Thanksgiving. Families give thanks for the lives that they live, thanks for the relative prosperity that many still enjoy, thanks for the countless blessings they've received from God's hand. We remember the harvest celebration of the Pilgrims at Plymouth by eating turkey, watching football, and taking naps – Thanks be to God! What a great holiday! This kind of gratitude should infuse our whole lives, but I did not wake up this morning, stretch, and give thanks to God for another day. I should have! For those of us who have the good fortune to have a job, shelter, clothing, and enough food to eat, it is a bit harder to keep the spirit of gratitude alive in each day, to remember the saying, "there but for the grace of God go I."

In the passage we heard this evening, Christ heals ten lepers. They see him in the road and call out to him, Master! Have mercy on us! This is the only time in Luke's gospel that someone who is not a disciple calls him that. Somehow, these outcasts know who Jesus is. Jesus tells them to "go and show yourselves to the priests." Stepping out in faith, these lepers do as he says and "as they went, they were made clean."

When they see that they are healed, nine out of the ten rush ahead to the priests to get a clean bill of health and to reconnect to the lives they'd left behind. One does not. One, a Samaritan, turns back, praising God. He falls to Jesus's feet with gratitude, giving thanks to God for his transformation. The Samaritan leper understands who Jesus is better than the others who were healed, even though he is an outsider among outsiders, ostracized because of his disease and marginalized as a foreigner. He understood that the only response to God's gracious mercy is thanksgiving and praise. *Is it possible that the most vulnerable among us are the first to grasp God's presence, power, and grace?*

I have found this to be true from the people who participate in a Bible Study in the Outreach and Advocacy Center I facilitate with Kate Taber every other Wednesday. Kate and Caitlyn started the study last year, and a group has met every week for almost a year and a half to reflect on different passages and pray together. A diverse and sometimes motley crew gathers around a table downstairs each week -- some folks are waiting for services in the Center, others are guests at our night shelter, and still others are folks who came once and return because they found something of value in our conversation.

Last week, a woman named Mary joined us, who had come once before. Mary is an energetic, live wire of a woman, a wound-up evangelist who somehow remains calm and respectful of the rest of the voices in the room most of the time. It is a group tradition to begin our time together with prayer, lifting up the joys and concerns of those around the table. Both times she has been with us, Mary has lifted up her gratitude -- thankfulness to God for another day, another chance to get it right, she said. Mary lives on the street. She is a recovering addict and former prostitute, which I know only because she proclaimed that she stopped going to church for a while because all they talked about was her -- prostitutes and tax collectors! She is an outsider among outsiders -- a homeless, black, woman, triple marginalized just for good measure. And yet, when it comes time to pray, she gives thanks to God for her life.

Mary has eyes to see the blessing that this life is, perhaps because she has very nearly lost it. Maybe some of you, in the shadow of grief or the pain of an illness, in the stress of a job search or in the miracle of a new birth, have also discovered this new way of seeing. This new perspective on the fragile blessing of life gives everything deeper meaning, and we are called to respond with thanks -- to fall down in the road in praise and gratitude.

My friends, God pours out limitless love and boundless grace upon us, upon all of us. Christ healed the sick and restored them to wholeness, brought outsiders to their rightful place in the beloved community. Like the Samaritan, like Mary, we are called to respond to God's love, grace, and healing with deep gratitude. How can we stop rushing to the next thing so that each day we might give God thanks and praise? If we have eyes to see, we will see that our lives overflow with the love of God, poured out in this community. We will see that our hearts can be filled with joy at the blessing of God's gracious forgiveness. We will see that our thirst and hunger can be satisfied by the feast set before us on our abundant communion table. Thanks be to God.