

Praising God

Luke 17:11-17

This has to be one of the most well-known stories from Jesus' earthly ministry. Usually we hear it at Thanksgiving as the archetypical story about proper thankfulness for the Lord's blessings.

I think I'm going to throw a wrench into that today.

As I was reading this and deciding how to preach on this text in a way that you haven't heard a hundred times before, something became clear to me.

As I said, the emphasis in this text is usually upon the gratitude of the one leper and the ingratitude of the nine. And it is true that one leper came back to thank Jesus and the others didn't, so that's a valid application of the story and the text.

It is, in fact, at first glance, almost incomprehensible that the other nine didn't come back. Leprosy, in Jesus' time, was a horrible disease. It was no more horrible in its effects on the body than it is today, and that is gruesome enough, but it was more horrible in its effects on a person's life. It was thought be highly contagious – a misconception which has since been disproved by medical science; it's actually pretty difficult to contract leprosy – and so lepers were ostracized by healthy people. They were relegated to leper colonies outside the town. They were

dependent on the healthy townspeople to provide them with food. And if they ventured outside the leper colony into healthy society, they were required to cry out, “Leper”, to announce their coming so healthy people could get out of their way and not risk exposure.

As you can see, it was a lonely, sad existence.

Jesus rescues these 10 men not only from the disease but from this life, as well. And only one comes back to thank Him. And he was of the hated class of Samaritans, considered half-breeds and despised by the people of Judah and Galilee.

Notice, though, everything it says of him:

- when he saw he was healed he came back to Jesus;
- he threw himself at Jesus’ feet;
- he thanked Jesus;
- he was a Samaritan.

Is that all? No, there’s one more thing:

- he was praising God in a loud voice.

Now notice what Jesus commends him for. Does Jesus say, “ Was no one found to return and thank Me except this foreigner?”

No, Jesus doesn’t even mention his thankfulness, does He? What He says is, “ Was no one found to return and **give praise to God** except this foreigner?”

Again, remember, the text says, ‘...he came back, **praising God in a loud voice....**”

He is not specifically commended by Jesus for thankfulness, but for praising God.

And then Jesus says, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” That can also be translated, “your faith has saved you.”

Perhaps what set this man apart from the nine others was not so much his gratitude, but that he recognized the source of his healing. It was his faith in God, and with it his recognition that God had healed him that made him well, that saved him.

I don't what the other nine thought. We are not told. But it's a fair assumption that they did not praise God for their healing. Perhaps they attributed it to Jesus as a healer, a man who knew the mysteries of the healing arts. Perhaps they attributed it to luck. Who knows. But the only things that Jesus mentions about the leper who returned were that

- he was foreigner;
- he returned, and;
- he praised God.

Once again, it is faith that saves. As always, it is faith that saves. In this man's case, his faith comes through his exposure to the living Word of God, Jesus. Perhaps in your case, as in mine, it came through the waters of Holy Baptism. Perhaps in your case it

came through someone introducing to God's Word, the Bible. Whatever the vehicle, you came, at some point in your life to faith in Jesus as the One who came from heaven to die on a cross to take the punishment for your sins, and the sins of the whole world. You believe that His death paid for your sins, and His resurrection was the Father's validation of His sacrifice as ample and complete. And you believe that God promises that all who believe in Jesus as their Savior have forgiveness and eternal life as a completely free gift of His grace. There is no better news than that.

But Jesus' words in this story beg the question of each of us: Do I praise God for all the good in my life? Do I give God the credit for all the blessings in my life? When things go right in my life, who or what do I credit?

How many times have you or I "knocked on wood" because things were going well and we wanted to ensure they would continue to do so?

How often have you said the words when you escaped something bad or when something good happened, "That was lucky!"

Or "I must be living right." Or, "Well, I dodged the bullet on that one."

What makes the situation more egregious is that we so infrequently give God the credit, not to mention the thanks and

praise, for the good things that happen, but let something bad happen, and we're quick to utter those immortal words, "Why is God doing this to me?" , or, "Why is God letting this happen to me?"

So He gets little credit for all the wonderful, good things that happen to us every single day of our lives, and most of the blame for all the bad things that happen.

And the fact of the matter is that far more goes right even on our worst days than goes wrong.

He is so faithful in His blessings, so dependable in His care of us, so trustworthy in providing all that we need in life, that we take it for granted, or even as our due.

But Scripture says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." James 1:17 (New International Version)

"Every good and perfect gift is from above..." Not some, not most, "every"!

Now let's really put ourselves on the spot. How often have we praised God for the daily blessings He showers us with every day? Have you thanked Him for the sun? for the rain (well, you might have recently!)? for your husband or wife? for your

parents? for your children? for your brother or sister? for the food you eat three times a day – or more!? for your home? for your health? for your job? for this country in which we live? for life? for eternal life? for this day, completely unique in the history of the world?

The one leper was right on several counts:

- he came back;
- he gave thanks to Jesus;
- he rightly recognized God as the source of His healing and praised Him for it.

Let's begin to day to praise God. Not just on Sunday, but every day.

Let's daily remind ourselves who the source of all the goodness and all the good things in our lives is.

Let's give thanks to God for something You never thanked Him for each day, beginning today.

Then, let us live lives which reflect our faith in Jesus, as well as our understanding that everything good in our lives comes from above, from the Father who watches over us above, and fills our lives with good things.