



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THANKSGIVING, NOVEMBER 26, 2020
DEUTERONOMY 8:7-18; PSALM 65; LUKE 17: 11-19

THANKFULNESS

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

Did the ten people suffering from leprosy just happen to be in the right place at the right time, when Jesus came by today? Oh, I so doubt that! This is chapter 17 of Luke! Jesus' fame has been spreading throughout the land, and he is on his way to Jerusalem. When he entered this village between Samaria and Galilee, I imagine the people were excited, had heard he was coming from someone who was travelling the road. Oh surely those

lepers were waiting (!), watching, hoping the rumors might be true? And then they see him coming through their village and they call out. They can't go over to him; it's against the law. But they have heard things about him!

"Hey, Jesus! Oh, Jesus, please look over here! Jesus, Master, please have mercy!"

And Jesus turns to them. He sees them! These ostracized people who are

ignored day in and day out by people who must stay far from them, who are afraid of them. They are now nobodies, invisible. But, then, this famous Jesus has turned to look at them when they called out!

“Have mercy, Jesus!”

And all Jesus says is, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

What kind of answer is that? They don’t know, but they know showing yourself to the priest is how you show you are clean of disease, and they have nothing to lose, so they start heading to the priests, hoping something good is going to happen. Something. A miracle maybe...

And then one of them notices. HOLY MERCY. I am healed!! This man Jesus cared for ME!

Just like that! Instantly. From a distance. From calling out for mercy, healing flows.

And this healed one runs back to Jesus. He is beside himself. You know that feeling. When you are so blessed, so overjoyed, so astounded with a

goodness that has befallen, that you feel like your heart could just explode?

And so the man runs with that energy of joy and throws himself at Jesus’ feet.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, thank you!

It’s a prayer, isn’t it? Thank you, Jesus. His heart is singing to Jesus. He is connected to Jesus.

Gratitude... is not about things; it’s about relationship. Our hearts overflow beyond the “thing” we’re grateful about, to the person we’re grateful to – and we’re *connected*. Being thankful is about relationship. And that’s what the God of love wants for us, calls us to, blesses us with.

I hear Moses making a very big deal out of being thankful to God in the Deuteronomy passage we read today. And I hear Jesus ask, “Where are the other nine?” in Luke’s Gospel passage. Is it because God needs our thanks in order to be acknowledged? Does God need praise from us in order to be God? What a puny god that would be!

Jesus took on our *very flesh* to be in relationship with us, and everything Jesus teaches us about living is how to be in relationship with the God who loves us, and in loving relationship with each other. Drawing us to gratitude is drawing us to open our hearts to deeper relationship.

That's why the Bible is full of calls to thanksgiving. The Bible is the story of a people's relationship with God. Israel's story. OUR story. But that story isn't hemmed in and contained like an artifact in the books: that story continues in every age! Even ours. *Morning by morning new mercies I see* – you know that old hymn? NEW mercies. This relationship with the Divine is a living story. And it is everyone's.

That's why so many wise people have said “thanks” is the most perfect prayer. Even in these hard times. Gratitude is relationship, and relationship is our true source of joy. That's not a gloss over pain and loss, or a chipper way to pretend no one is suffering today and we don't have serious work to do to be in right

relationship. Oh, how we know better than that! But search your heart for what you are thankful for, and the relationship is right there.

The last two sentences of the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu's *Book of Joy* say: “*Ultimately, joy is not something to learn, it is something to live. And our greatest joy is lived in deep, loving, and generous relationships with others.*”

Be the one who notices and goes running to Jesus with your heart. The blessing of relationship is that Jesus is already right here, on the worst, and on the best, days. And I am eternally grateful for that.

Do all of us here this morning just *happen* to be in the right place at the right time for Jesus to come into our midst today? Oh, I so doubt that! Because we've heard things about him, and we are excited that he is coming, and OUR hearts are full of hope, too. Hope in this Jesus. So here we are ON PURPOSE – in this church, in our living rooms and kitchens and dining tables, looking at computer screens or

holding phones – and we know Jesus is here.

And WE call out: “Hey, Jesus! Oh, Jesus, please look over here! Jesus, have mercy!”

And Jesus turns to us. He sees us! He sees every person who is thankful this day, and every person who is feeling bereft today because we have to keep our distance from people we love, and every person who is hungry for connection with **the love that is greater than us all**. And Jesus turns and looks at us WITH THAT GREAT LOVE before we even we call out.

And it is that love, that relationship, that renders us so blessed, so astounded with this goodness of love that has befallen us, that, like the one healed man who returned to Jesus in today’s Gospel, we could fall at the feet of the Holy One in thanks.

And then rise up, with hearts full of hope, to change this world to the New Earth – where every relationship is love. That would be a happy Thanksgiving.



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