November 26, 2017

Luke 17:11-19

Giving Thanks

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 17:11-19 The Message

It happened that as he made his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met him. They kept their distance but raised their voices, calling out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

Taking a good look at them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

They went, and while still on their way, became clean. One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. He kneeled at Jesus’ feet, so grateful. He couldn’t thank him enough—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus said, “Were not ten healed? Where are the nine? Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?” Then he said to him, “Get up. On your way. Your faith has healed and saved you.”

Usually on this Sunday, the Sunday after Thanksgiving, it is already Advent. The church is already decorated with Advent candles and Christmas wreaths. The Christmas tree is out with the funny church ornaments called Chrismons. Did you know Chrismon is a contraction for “Christ monograms”. They are Christmas decorations with Christian symbols on them. They help us to remember that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus’ birthday.

The word Advent comes from the Latin word adventus and means “coming”. Advent is the 4 weeks before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. The four weeks of Advent is when we prepare for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ. It is a time when we acknowledge our own longing for, and need of forgiveness, salvation and a new beginning. It is when we look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, but we also look forward anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by Christ’s first coming.[[1]](#footnote-2) Advent is also the beginning of the Christian year. In the church we say the beginning of the year isn’t January 1, but the first Sunday that we look forward to the coming of Christ.

So, since it isn’t Advent yet, we have an opportunity on this day that we celebrate the end of the Christian year to give thanks. We can reflect on what we celebrated as a nation this past Thursday as we give thanks. Our scripture is one that I read to our preschoolers the week before Thanksgiving so they will know the importance of saying thank you. I think that I read this scripture not as a way to say look how wonderful it is to give thanks, but instead I use this scripture as a way to threaten the children into being thankful. You know, using the Bible as a weapon instead of a book of stories of God’s love and grace. It is like when my children are fighting and I quote the words that Jesus said at the Last Supper, “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). I usually don’t say that verse with love in my voice. I say it more with anger so that my children will stop fighting! Maybe this story can teach us about God’s love and grace instead of being used as a weapon to make children be thankful.

Jesus transforms the lives of ten people who had been shunned by their community. They were ostracized because of their leprosy. Having leprosy was bad enough. The disease disfigured people physically. It reduced a person’s ability to feel pain, and wounds were left untreated. In Jesus’ time, leprosy was considered highly contagious and there was no cure. There was the physical burden of the disease and then the pain of being isolated and cut off from loved ones. There was no safe place, and if you had leprosy you could not enter the villages or the cities.

The law in the Leviticus says that if you were healed from a disease that had ostracized you from the community, you had to go to the priest. Only the priest could certify you as healed so your place in the community could be restored.

All ten are made well. All ten of the lepers did just what they were told, they went to the priest as Jesus commanded and along the way they were made well. One noticed that he had been healed, and he turned back to give thanks. He could not continue without offering a word of gratitude.

When Jesus’ audience heard this story the part that would make everyone take notice was that the one who gave thanks was a Samaritan. A Samaritan was one of those despised by Jesus’ contemporaries. Jesus seems disappointed that only one expressed gratitude. It is to this one that Jesus says, “Your faith has healed and saved you.” All ten were physically cured, but only the one who gave thanks became whole.

Giving thanks makes us notice God’s grace. Giving thanks draws us beyond our normal and usual preoccupation with the details, the challenges, and the responsibilities of the day. Noticing and seeing grace lifts us outward, outside of ourselves. Giving thanks helps us connect with others.[[2]](#footnote-3)

The one who returned to give thanks saw the healing as a gift of love from God. His healing gave him his family and his friends back, but his thankfulness, his gratitude, helped make him whole. How can we not take life or God for granted? How can we not just go through the busyness of life? How can we enjoy life as a precious gift and praise God each and every day? How can we open our eyes to see all the ways that healing happens? How can we open our eyes to see all the ways that forgiveness is offered? How can we open our eyes to see all the ways that love is shared?

When I come to this place, I am blessed. I listen and I see the ways that God’s Spirit is moving. In this place, I see how the broken are molded into a loving community. In this place all are welcomed to approach the altar of God. This is the place that I need to come. This is the place and you are the people that give me to strength to face next week. I come to this place not because I am ready, but I come because God welcomes me joyfully. I come to this place not because I have done everything that I should, but because I haven’t and because I have failed, I really need to come.

I come to this place to express my thanks to God. I am made whole when I express my gratitude. When I praise God, I connect with God because my focus isn’t on myself, it is on God. God wants us to enjoy life, to be amazed and enthusiastic. God wants us to be grateful and adoring. God wants to share our joy with us and for us to share our joy with God, because God knows we are only truly whole when we experience and express our gratitude.

We can express our gratitude at any time. Psalm 113:3 says, “From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised” (NRSV). There may be times in our lives where we feel like we can’t be thankful. Times when we feel overwhelmed, times when we feel like there is not one more bad thing that we can endure. We can make the choice each and every day to thank God for the gift of life that we have been given that day. Psalm 104:33 says, “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I’m still alive” (CEB).

We have an opportunity today to notice grace as we are going on a walk, as we listen to laughter, as we feel the cool breeze. We have an opportunity today to see goodness as we say thank you to someone who helps us. We have an opportunity today to pay attention to healing as we receive the kindness of a stranger. We have an opportunity today to stop to take in blessing. May God open our eyes to see the thousand blessings that God showers upon us each and every day. Today is a day for us to acknowledge that all we have and are has been given to us. May we live lives of gratitude and grace this day and every day.[[3]](#footnote-4) It is part of our daily discipline as United Methodists. It is who we are created to be. Every day we have the choice to act like the Samaritan and become whole through offering our thanks to God. Our choice, every day, is to go down the road of negativity and despair or turn our hearts to God and offer our real thanks to God.

May our eyes open and our ears awake. May we thank God for this most amazing day. May our hearts sing and sing and sing again, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is in within me bless God’s holy name.” Amen.

1. http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-advent [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2013/11/luke-17-11-19/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2013/11/luke-17-11-19/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)