

Jesus heals the ten Lepers.

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 men with a skin disease 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’s feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” ***

A large dog walks into a butcher shop carrying a purse in its mouth. He puts the purse down and sits in front of the meat case. "What is it, boy?" the butcher jokingly asks. "Want to buy some meat?" "Woof!" barks the dog. "Hmm," says the butcher. "What kind? Liver, bacon, steak ..." "Woof!" interrupts the dog. "And how much steak? Half a pound, one pound ..." "Woof!" The amazed butcher wraps up the meat and finds the money in the dog's purse. As the dog leaves, he decides to follow. The dog enters an apartment building, climbs to the third floor, and begins scratching at a door. With that, the door swings open and an angry man starts shouting at the dog. "Stop!" yells the butcher. "He's the most intelligent animal I've ever seen!" "Intelligent?" says the man. "This is the third time this week he's forgotten his key." He wasn't thankful.

Contrast that to the story of Pam, who worked in downtown Ottawa. Every morning, she encountered a middle-aged woman in a shabby coat asking for spare change in front of St. Luke's church. She greeted everyone with a smile and a pleasant "Good morning." Pam almost always gave her something. After almost a year of this routine, however, the woman in the shabby coat disappeared. Pam wondered what had happened to her. Then, one beautiful day, she was in front of the church again, still wearing the same, shabby coat. As Pam reached into her purse for the usual donation, the woman stopped her. "Thank you for helping me all those days," she said. "You won't see me again because I've got a job." With that, she reached into a bag and handed Pam a wrapped package. She had been standing at her old spot waiting, not for a handout, but for the people she recognized so that she could give each of them a doughnut. She was thankful.

So, on this Thanksgiving Sunday as many of us anticipate a lovely meal with loved ones and many others, even in our own community may go without – how then, shall we be thankful? I have a few thoughts. Be thankful even in difficult circumstances. This kind of thankfulness is faith. And it's darn difficult to do sometimes.

The story we heard from the gospel of Luke about the ten lepers — is a more complex one than it appears on first reading. We read the story too quickly, I think. Slow it down, and picture it with me.

We start with ten men who have the worst disease of their day. The physical consequences are absolutely awful. Leprosy attacks the body, leaving sores, missing fingers, missing toes, damaged limbs. In many cases, the initial pain of leprosy gives way to something more terrible than that — a loss of sensation in nerve endings, leading to more damage to more body parts. The disease can take 30 years to run its course, and in that time span, entire limbs can simply fall off. It is a most horrible disease. We have nearly an impossible task in trying to understand what it was like 2,000 years ago, when medical treatment as we know it was virtually non-existent. I'm not sure we really get how bad this disease must have been in Jesus' day. The emotional pain of a leper, however, must have been even worse than the physical pain. They were removed from family, from their community. There could be no contact whatsoever, with children or grandchildren. Certainly, no kisses or hugs goodbye!

Lepers tended to roam together, looking for food, begging for assistance from a great distance, learning to yell in loud voices, both from the need to warn others, and to beg for help. It must have been horrible. And yet, in this account, ten men encounter Jesus, and hear him say the most unusual thing. *"We want to be well!"* they scream at Jesus. And Jesus responds, *"Go and show yourselves to the priest."*

Now, just like today, the local priest had duties other than leading worship on each Sabbath. In that time they were also something of a health official. If a person was miraculously healed of leprosy, it was up to the priest to inspect the body, to test for a complete removal of the disease, and to announce the person healed. In such cases, the person would have been cleansed, and at that point, it would be fine for the leper to see family again and even look for work again. If the priest gave them the OK, they were officially healed!

Now, Jesus says to these lepers, *"Go and show yourselves to the priests."* They look down at their bodies. The hands of one man are still mangled. Another man looks at his leg, which ends with a filthy rag at the knee. Another looks at his skin and finds it as repulsive as ever. In other words, all of these men were no better off than they had been ten minutes earlier, when they had first spotted the famous teacher. And yet, they headed off in search of the priests. And on their way, they were healed. On their way, a hand reappeared, and tingled with life. A crutch tripped on a filthy rag, as it fell to the ground. The leg was back, healthy, whole, complete. The skin cleared, and the tiny hairs on the forearm turned from snow white to brown. One looked at the other, another looked at the rest, and the screaming started — not of pain, but absolute joy! They raced off in the distance, not believing that the nightmare was finally over.

But in order for the miracle to actually happen, these men had to start walking in faith before their circumstances had changed one tiny bit. Is there a more potent lesson for us, on this Thanksgiving week? You cannot wait until the problems are over to start walking in faith. You can't put conditions on God. You cannot say, "Okay God, as soon as there's enough money, I follow your instructions." You cannot pray, "Please God, if you'll just solve this problem in my family, I'll go to church." You can't put conditions on God! Instead, God places a demand for faith on us before anything at all has changed. God might say, "Love me despite the disease. Obey me despite the lack of talent, or the lack of resources. Follow me now, despite the depression. Say no to the temptation, while it still is difficult. Praise me in the darkest of nights, and in the worst of circumstances."

This is the nature of God. If we praised God only on the good days, only in the best of circumstances, it would not be faith at all. How shall we be thankful? Be thankful in the work of God's goodness, because this kind of thankfulness is worship.

One of the men came back to Jesus and praised God. He was thankful. He was public about it. He was loud! Why was he so loud? This guy had been forced to yell for as long as he'd had leprosy. Had it been years? He'd probably yelled so long; he didn't know how to come to God quietly in a normal voice. When he came back and fell at the feet of Jesus, he was just louder than the normal person, and he was praising God. This week, let us be sure to take time to acknowledge God's goodness. Be sure to actually *be* thankful. And be loud about it! Being thankful is worship. Make sure your thankfulness leads to action. You know, do something about it!

One healed leper came back. One caught himself in the midst of the celebration and returned to Jesus. He reversed his steps, put his family on hold, put the priest on hold, and came back to the one who healed him. "*Where are the other nine?*" Jesus asked. Jesus said, "*Go, and show yourselves to the priests.*" Jesus never commanded that any of them express thankfulness to God, or return to him, the healer. Nevertheless, that is what Jesus expected.

What kind of action is Jesus looking for from you or from me? Has God's Holy Spirit been urging you toward something? Has God been tugging at you for some step of faith? Is there a family, a friend, or even a stranger in need of help this Thanksgiving season? Is there something you feel compelled to do? Follow that urging of the Spirit — otherwise our thankfulness will last about as long as that full tummy from a good meal! A life of thankfulness is a life of wellness.

There are three different words that are all trying to say the same thing. They're all saying that "this *leper-used-to-be* is well!"

Verse 15. "*One of them, when he saw he was healed . . .*" and stop there. This Greek word is "**hi-a-tha**," which is a purely medical term. It means to mend, to repair. It's like

a broken bone finally mending. This guy was all patched up. Then verse 17. Jesus asked, "*Were not all ten cleansed?*" This is a different word than **hi-a-tha**. This is "**kath-a-ri-dzo**," the root word for our "catheter." I can see you all squirming! It, too, is a medical word in part, for it means, "remove the impurities." When a doctor inserts a heart "cath", angioplasty might remove a blockage of an artery. It will cause healing. And now, one more word. In verse 19, Jesus says to this very thankful man, "*Rise and go; your faith has made you well.*"

"*Made you well . . .*" that's a different word. It's not a medical word, necessarily, although it was used to describe the safe delivery of a baby. This is the word, "so-dso," which means, "saved." The Greeks used it for people who escaped dangerous situations. When sailors surviving a storm at sea had been saved, they said "**So-dzo.**" When Matthew began his gospel, he started with the Christmas story. The angel told Joseph to name the Christ child "*Jesus*," because that name meant that he would "*save people from their sins.*" He would "**so-dzo**" the people.

When Paul described what would happen to a person who publicly professed Jesus as Lord and Saviour, he used this same word. ". . . *If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (so-dzo). For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (so-dzo!) (Romans 10:9)*

Do you recall that a priest must make a declaration that a leper had been healed? There were a great many details involved in this process – lots of red tape. But did you know that in our record of the Old Testament, and the New Testament, that every single healing of a leper came by supernatural means? Now think about this: there were great details about what would happen if a leper became naturally well, but it never happened as far as we know. Leprosy was a life sentence of pain and exclusion. But there were some healings. The sister of Moses had leprosy for a week and was miraculously cured. A man named Naaman was also cured. And that's it, in the OT. In the NT, however, Jesus heals lepers as if they had mild colds, and he had the right medicine. Jesus continued the practice of healing lepers not naturally, but supernaturally.

This is God saying loudly and clearly to us: "This is my son. God is with you, for only God has healed lepers. Only God." This is also God saying to us that no matter who or what you are, no matter where you've been or what you've done – God loves you. And me. No abuse has scarred you so badly that Jesus won't touch you, hold you and restore you. No sin has made you unlovable. It was Jesus' death that paid for your sin. No fear has disqualified you. No problem has put your life on hold. No failure has negated his love. The miracle of Thanksgiving is the love of Jesus, for you and for me. No exceptions, no qualifications, no doubts. We are loved.

And for that, O God, we are thankful!!!!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

