

Sermon for Sunday, October 12, 2025

“Why me”, is often the question that follows having an unwanted event (broken tree limb falls on your car hood just when you need to get somewhere; you receive a very tough diagnosis, you lose your position.) Seldom is “why me” asked, when an unexpected grace is received, a turn of good fortune; something wonderful, beautiful, just falls into your lap. In neither circumstance is the question warranted, as a fellow priest once said to me long ago, maybe the question should be, why not me?

The ten lepers did not expect Jesus to come. The appearance of Jesus was an unexpected gift. He was traveling a route that lay close to the border between Galilee and Samaria. Jewish travelers from Galilee who wanted to avoid Samaria took this route. A group of lepers have gathered on the fringe of a village. As Jesus enters the village, they cry out to him: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

What kind of mercy they were asking for the scripture does not need to tell us. They call Jesus by name. His reputation for being a true healer has spread widely. In a time of many false healers, and little effective treatment for disease or physical injury, even by the most skilled physicians of the day, an actual healing was News. Big News, news that traveled swiftly far and wide. They hope for healing and believe he can give it to them.

How did they know the one approaching was Jesus? Metaphysically speaking, I believe they knew because they knew – it could be no one else. Besides, undoubtedly, there was a fair size group with Jesus, the twelve and others that would have made it seem more probable than not to an onlooker that this was

a teacher, someone well known and followed. A teacher and, they have in hope assumed, a healer, if the stories are true. They call him Master, as though they were disciples.

They have kept their distance, as necessary. Jesus speaks to them across the 150 foot distance required in the law. “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And they go! In obedience and hope – and, are made clean on the way. As simple as Naaman’s healing. To show themselves to the priests is their way back to their former lives. Through the offices of the priests, they will be able to return to society, family and friends. They had suffered greatly: isolation, rejection, fear, pain, and helplessness in the face of a disease without remedy. A very cruel disease for they could see family, friends, neighbors, but not touch, not draw near – nor could family, friends, and neighbors draw near to them.

When the lepers discover their healing, nine continue on their way to show themselves to the “priests.” Eager in the wonder of their healing. But one, in his joy and amazement, turns back and in a loud voice, praises God and prostrates himself at the feet of Jesus and THANKS HIM. He recognizes that God has acted through Jesus. This is the only place in the N.T. where the one healed directly thanks Jesus himself. This one truly ‘sees’ Jesus.

Once again, an outsider, one despised or disregarded, is the corrective to the assumption that Israel, God’s “chosen people”, were chosen because of their deserving or superiority. In the biblical record, outsiders serve a critical role in God’s plan, at one moment essential to the survival of God’s people, at another point one ‘sees’ more clearly than God’s chosen, and so become witness to God’s presence and mercy. Insiders and outsiders – all are a part of God’s

purposes and mysterious ways. From Esau to Naaman, to Ruth, and in the gospel record, the Samaritan woman whose daughter is ill, who would gather up the crumbs under the Lord's table of mercy, and the woman at the well. And so it is with the one leper, who returned to give thanks.

For the Samaritan leper, an extraordinary moment, a marvelous moment. One can imagine his joy. The outsider, the one considered other, alien, outside the "chosen of God." It is he that responds with profound gratitude. It has opened his eyes; the eyes of his heart and soul and prostrates himself at the feet of Jesus in thanksgiving.

Jesus then asks three questions, apparently rhetorical questions. "Were not ten made clean? Where are the other nine? ...were none of them found to return and give praise to God, except this foreigner?" The questions underline the character of the Samaritan – this is not one whose suffering has made bitter, angry, or cynical. He does not feel that because he has suffered, he was owed the healing grace he received.

Gratitude has filled his being and it is offered to Jesus, who says to him: "get up and go your way; your faith has made you well. Or, in the words of another translation, "your faith has brought you salvation." What is our wellness, if not salvation?

What is gratitude in our lives day to day. We give thanks over a meal, we give thanks for a favor done, a help given, a compliment or praise, etc. Giving thanks is routine (but not insincere) something done without much fuss or attention, but necessary to good relations with others, as we are taught in childhood, and

of course we are pleased to receive thanks when we have given something – time, effort, a gift.

Gratitude is also of much greater depth and purpose. Gratitude allows us to “see,” as the leper was enabled to “see” Jesus. Gratitude opens our eyes to the many ways we are loved by God. It is a necessary part of our salvation – the saving grace that turns us from self-centered living and thinking to the greatness of God’s love for us.

Gratitude is not confined to the large and magnificent in life, gratitude lives in the many small gifts of our lives. Hot coffee or tea in the morning, the newspaper that did not get soaked in the early morning rain, a comforting hand on the shoulder when one is feeling a bit down. There are myriad ways in which we can focus our gratitude for the countless gifts in our lives. Giving thanks in everything, as St Paul advises, strengthens our relationship with God. Gratitude deepens relationship, widens the heart and spirit, inspires spiritual imagination and understanding. In the words of David Steindl-Rast: “The root of joy is gratefulness. It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.”

The one who praised God, and then fell prostrate before Jesus, in giving thanks, offering to Jesus his profound gratitude, established a relationship with Jesus and so was brought to his salvation.

G.K. Chesterton: “You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace

before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, walking, playing, dancing, and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.”

Give thanks for the many things we take for granted day to day. Clean water, streetlights, books. Remember next you open a book, more than 52 million people in this country cannot read the Bible, a prayer, a prescription bottle, a street sign, or their child’s schoolwork. Be grateful for the beauty and power of words and the Word. Gratitude will bring you close Jesus our Lord. Amen.