

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today in our Gospel lesson we have a story of ten men with leprosy that we believe are healed but only one grateful Samaritan returns to thank Jesus and the other nine ungrateful are nowhere to be found. If we look quickly at today's Gospel text this way, we may fall into the same predicament we fell into the other week with the rich man and the poor sick beggar named Lazarus who laid at the gate of the rich man's house. In the end when they both die; the rich man suffers in hell while Lazarus lays in the bosom of Abraham. In our quick conclusion about the story of Lazarus and the rich man, we may have taken delight in the outcome of the story due to our animosity toward the rich man, but the Good News of the story was NOT vengeance. Like that Gospel lesson, the lesson this week is not simple or clear cut either when we quickly look at it.

One of the predicaments from quick judgment today with these ten men with leprosy, is to conclude that nine are ungrateful and that this is a story focused on ingratitude. Gratitude plays a role in the story. However, it may be a bit too simple to just point the finger at those who did not return in gratitude to Jesus. We ought to ask ourselves, is this merely a story told by Luke to simply give us license to judge the gratitude of others with very little fact to go on?

Luke in the very next chapter has Jesus telling the parable of the persistent widow seeking justice from a disrespectful judge. At the close of the parable, we hear Jesus saying this:

⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸ I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?' (Luke 18:7-8)

It is God who grants justice, forgiveness, healing, and mercy, and not our judgment. If we say we have the faith we claim to have, then we ought to believe that it is God who judges and not us. However, today we are NOT told this story to simply judge the gratitude of others. Rather, in light of this story, we might want to ask *ourselves*, how grateful are we and how do we show our gratitude for the healing we too receive from Jesus Christ? Is our gratitude revealed in our judgment?

God through the Holy Spirit has blessed us with a faith that allows us to see and understand the very healing from our sin that we receive from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ...how then do we show our gratitude for this? Do we show our gratitude for faith and the healing that comes from that faith by asking for more faith? Gee God, thanks, may I have more!

I suspect the general consensus about this story is that the nine who did not return to thank Jesus were ungrateful, but I have to say that this is not my take on the story, nor has it ever been my take on the story. There is much more about the story that is *not said* that only feeds our assumptions and conclusions. We know nothing other than Jesus entered a village and was approached by ten leprosy men. We only know the one who thanked Jesus was a Samaritan. And while it says, as they went, they were cleansed, Jesus asks, "Were not ten made clean?" The circumstances direct us to easily conclude that all ten were cleansed but the question from Jesus begs the question, were all really cleansed, or was only one cleansed?

We can only conclude that only one returned to thank Jesus and *assume* the other nine were ungrateful. Jesus told these ten men to “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” A person suffering from leprosy *who was healed* had to show themselves to a priest according to Levitical law. Following healing, the law prescribes an 8-day ritual for lepers to become ritually clean and re-enter the community. This process was overseen by a priest who restored the individual to their family, home, and community by proving their cleansing and their ability to participate in temple worship.

After being isolated away from loved ones...for god only knows how long, and then going through a ritual for a week and a half, I think I would of high-tailed it out of there to home to see my family. Nonetheless, did these ten men NOT do what Jesus told them to do? “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

We all, when in a predicament, look closely at the “letter-of-the-law” and conclude this is what the law says, or this is what I was told...Jesus says to the ten men, and I quote, “Go and show yourselves to the priests,” did they not do that? Did Jesus tell them to return to give thanks? But pastor it only right, or it is the considerate and courteous thing to do. Yes it is! But before we *judge* these nine men for their ingratitude, can we consider them Jews who are following Levitical law that the Samaritan does not follow? Furthermore, before we judge, consider how we show our gratitude to God for all God has done for us through Jesus Christ. I think we might find our finger pointing at the nine only points back to ourselves.

There is a far greater Gospel lesson than just the legalistic finger pointing that is not the Gospel at all. The deeper Gospel lesson is revealed in what is not being said to us directly about the 10 lepers that approach Jesus. We are being shown that the healing of the grace of God is not limited by our borders, our social boundaries, or our false assumptions and legalistic conclusions. Jesus is directing our attention to those on the margins by using outsiders to show us, that when it comes to God and faith, Jesus Christ is Lord of all and that the boundaries of God’s Kingdom extend beyond the boundaries of the church, this culture, and our legalistic attitudes.

Looking at the appointed text, we see that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He is on the border between Galilee and Samaria and is met by a band of ten lepers living a life of social isolation and physical decay. Jesus has just walked into a place of rejection, encountering people who live on the outside of acceptance, in a land of repulsion. This alone shows us that Jesus and his disciples are forced to walk on the margins, close to that forbidden territory of the Samaritans which is symbolically a place of rejection. As they entered this area, the lepers stood far off, and the Gospel tells us they kept their distance. There was no specific distance, meaning there was no formal law stating specifics, however, there was unwritten authority that made these folks who lived with this dreaded disease stand at least fifty yards away from healthy people. Nothing could better show the utter isolation in which leprous people lived than this.

While it is not directly said or written in this passage this is how society has and continues to deal with disease and the people who live with it. We know also that Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans; yet we know too there was at least one Samaritan in this group of ten lepers...the one who turned back to Jesus...and as a Samaritan, he is the most unlikely one to do so. But even with these social differences, this physical ailment forced them to live in their own colonies. Like most

societies of this time period, boundaries were ordered by specific rules regarding how Jews should relate to Gentiles and Samaritans, how priests should relate to Israelites, how men should relate to women, and so on and so forth. With this understanding of social boundaries and proper behaviors according to these boundaries, perhaps this is why this Samaritan abandoned the others after being cleansed.

This group of ten men with leprosy shouted to Jesus saying, “Jesus. Master have mercy on us!” Together as an isolated group, they lifted up one voice. Jesus notices them and commands them to go and show themselves to the priests. And as they go off to show themselves to the priests perhaps not all were made clean, and one of the men notices and sees that he is made clean, he sees that he is no longer the same as the others, and he abandons the others, he separates himself from the nine because of the social understandings of boundaries. Furthermore, is the Samaritan who came back to give his thanks to God being disobedient to social order by giving thanks to a God his culture rejects? Are the other nine Jews who follow the Levitical 8-day cleansing ritual with a priest before they can go to Jesus to give thanks? Is this why the Samaritan is the only one to return? Are the other nine Jews who are following Levitical law? Yes, these scenarios are a stretch, but again our borders, our social boundaries, or our false assumptions and legalistic conclusions restrict our faith and our gratitude.

We are all gathered here today, each one of us different, our diversity is not as obvious, but diverse nonetheless. We are gathered and centered here in this place and together there is one need we all share...and that is our need for God’s mercy and forgiveness. In our common need of grace and forgiveness we too are healed by Christ just like the ten leprosy men are healed and we are touched in this very meal of bread and wine and in this Holy meal we are given forgiveness and faith. How then do we show our gratitude?

We are all blessed daily in ways we seldom perceive and blessed in ways we can never repay, and we *ALL* often fail to be grateful. We all fail because we do not see fully the blessings, we receive just like the sins seen and unseen in our lives. The voices that shout a need to Jesus reflect the voices that shout praise to God...and like these voices, our faith and our gratitude also ought to be as vast and as indifferent. When we go from here, may our faith be revealed in the gratitude we show others and not restricted by our assumptions and legalistic attitudes.

Go now and show yourselves, show the mercy and forgiveness you have been given, not by pointing out the shortcomings of the world, not by pointing out the ingratitude of others, rather let us go and show ourselves by showing the very gratitude that God has shown to us all in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.