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Thank you!
Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus^[d] was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, **ten lepers**^[e] approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, **praising God with a loud voice**. ¹⁶ He **prostrated himself** at Jesus’^[f] feet and **thanked** him. And he was a **Samaritan**. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?” ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your **faith** has made you well.”

The late Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, wrote a moving book called *Night*, about his experience as a Jewish prisoner in the concentration camps. He survived some of the worst crimes of Nazi Germany, and after that, he became a respected author and speaker. I had the privilege of talking with him when I was in college. He was a small, quiet man, of deep wisdom and humility.

In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Wiesel was asked whether after all the tragedy he had experienced, **if he still had a place inside him for gratefulness**.

He replied: **Absolutely**. Right after the war, I went around telling people, **“Thank you just for living, for being human”**. And to this day, the words that come most frequently from my lips are, **“Thank you”**. When a person doesn’t have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost **be defined** by his or her attitude toward gratitude.

He went on to say: **For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone and look at his or her smile**.

Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*, HarperOne: NY, 2018. Pg. 44

Can you imagine surviving the Holocaust, and coming out with that attitude? Isn’t that **powerful? And humbling?** Especially when we complain about so many small things in life?

Someone who witnessed the death of so many people, even children, at the hands of evil, and he's full of gratitude.

And he isn't talking about having good things,
he's talking about *life itself being a gift. A grace.*

Karl Barth once said that *grace and gratitude belong together like thunder and lightning.*

He believed that the most *basic human response is gratitude.*

But how often do we realize that life itself is a gift?

Gratitude is the theme of this story today.

Lepers in the time of Jesus likely had a skin disease that we know as Hansen's disease.

Very contagious.

But it was also seen as a ritual impurity.

Which meant that lepers had to live outside the city, cut off from friends and family.

They often banded together, which is probably why ten of them came to Jesus.

They were cut off from worship, which is why it's so important that Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests.

That would be the proof that they were healed.

That would restore them to friends and family, and to worship.

This story is found *only in the Gospel of Luke,*

and it's part of a *broader theme of Jesus' message of for ALL people.*

In fact, in Luke 10 we hear the story of the *Good Samaritan---*

a foreigner, a Samaritan, is the one who helps the man in the ditch, while faithful Jewish leaders walk by.

That story emphasizes the *love of neighbor,*

This story emphasizes *the love of God.*

The two together make up the *Great Commandment* according to Jesus.

This story of the ten lepers happens *when Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem,* and while he's been speaking about the *cost of discipleship.*

When he heals the ten men, and *ONE Samaritan returns to give thanks,*

It shows that *discipleship is for everyone,* even outsiders.

And discipleship is *rooted in gratitude.*

There's even a ***PATTERN to the gratitude in this story***—
it's more than just saying “thank you”.

First there is an ***awareness*** of what has happened---
gratitude is about ***paying attention***.

Next he ***turns back toward Jesus***—
gratitude is about ***reorientation***

Then ***praise***—
gratitude is about ***appreciating God***

Then a heartfelt--***Thank you***

And finally the opportunity to ***go and share*** the good news.

Karoline Lewis, Workingpreacher.org.

Listen to it again:

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

Did you hear all that?

Awareness.

Turning back.

Praising God.

Saying thanks.

And we can only imagine the ***stories he told*** his friends and family about being healed!

In this story gratitude is more than just a thank you.

Gratitude is both ***a NOUN AND A VERB***.

It's full of ***emotion***---this man praises God with a loud voice and falls on his face at Jesus' feet.

It is something we ***feel***.

Gratitude is also a ***verb***—it is the act of turning back, praising, worshiping, and thanking, and sharing the good news. Something we ***do***.

On Wednesday nights we recently studied *Freeing Jesus* by Diana Butler Bass about the many faces of Jesus.

She has also written an incredible book about gratitude, called *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*.

It's awesome.

In her book she talks about gratitude being a lot like LOVE---
full of emotion, a ***noun***,

but also a ***verb***---a habit or ethic, something we do.

She says that gratitude is really *a way of life*.

It is a disposition, and *framework* for seeing the world.

Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*, HarperOne:NY, 2018. Pg. 52-53

One time, someone complimented Diana Butler Bass

by saying that she had ‘*soft eyes*’. *Ever heard that term?*

She didn’t fully understand what it meant, so she looked it up.

‘Soft eyes’ is a way of seeing *all of the world* around you—even those things on the periphery.

It’s an *openness* to the world, a *softness*, a *taking it all in*.

As opposed to squinting or almost closed eyes,

that are reacting to the world in a fight or flight response.

‘Soft eyes’ opens our hearts and lives to gratitude.

Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*, HarperOne:NY, 2018. Pg. 66

For Christians, gratitude is also the *foundation of our worship*.

When we come together,

we start with a *Call to worship*, praising God.

We sing a *Gloria Patri*—*Glory be to the Father...*

We sing the *Doxology*—*Praise God from whom all blessings flow!*

We also follow the *PATTERN of gratitude* in this story!

We pay *attention*,

we *re-orient* our hearts and minds,

we *praise* God,

we say *thank you*,

and we *leave to go and share* the good news!

But I wonder, *how* do we live a life of gratitude---*ALL THE TIME?*

How do we cultivate the *feeling AND the doing?*

Bass suggests that we think of *gratitude as a HABIT*.

We are all creatures of habit.

Just ask my husband about how I order the same thing at restaurants.

Or use the same big coffee cup each morning.

If we think about it,

We can make gratitude a habit.

How?

Well, we can start by developing *gratitude practices*—

like writing down all your blessings in a journal,
writing thank you notes,
meditating on God's goodness,
praying prayers of thanksgiving.

Then, we can develop '*cues*' for *gratitude*.
Habits form because we do them at the same time everyday,
or in the same place.
We can choose *a place and a time* for some of our gratitude,
maybe over a cup of coffee, or as we fall asleep at night.

Catholic Jesuits practice something called *Examen* at night.
It's a way of looking back over your day,
for those times and places when you felt near or far from God.
Then you *give thanks for the gifts of the day*.
What if we ALL did that, every day?

Gratitude is good for the *soul, the mind, and the body*.
Study after study has shown that gratitude is good medicine, literally.
Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*, HarperOne:NY, 2018. Pg. 44-49

Bass says something else amazing in her book.
She says that gratitude *makes every human being a priest*.
It empowers the soul.
Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks*, HarperOne:NY, 2018. Pg. 34
What does it mean for us to be priests?
Well, priests lead in worship---
And worship is grounded in *Thanksgiving and gratitude*.
As priests we live lives of gratitude, and direct others in the same path!

Does all this gratitude make us like Pollyanna, ignoring the pain of the world?
No. Not at all.
Gratitude is not a panacea for pain or evil.
It doesn't rid the world of suffering or injustice.
But it does *help us survive* in this world of pain, and live in it with *joy and praise*.

Gratitude isn't a denial of what's happening,
it's an acknowledgment of pain—and the ways we *choose to RESPOND to it*.
We don't have to respond in bitterness, anger, jealousy, or despair.
We can *respond to life, as if it were a gift*.

How can you do that this week?

Don't you know people who consider their difficult lives,
And even their most painful experiences, to be a gift?

I feel that way.

I believe that *joy is deeper when sorrow has been deep.*

I believe we have a *greater appreciation for life, and God,*

when we have lived through experiences that test us—in more ways than one.

I've learned that some of the *most tragic lives*
are filled with the most gratitude.

Many famous hymn writers suffered enormous personal loss.

The famous hymn we sing today, "*Now Thank We All Our God*" was written
by a German Lutheran Pastor named *Martin Rinkart,*

who was a pastor during the 30 years war, and the plague of 1637.

During that plague he had over 100 funerals a week, *including for his own wife.*

Yet he continued to worship, he continued to see God at work,

he continued to give thanks to God for blessings.

When the city was taken over and given an unjust tax,

he protested with a prayer vigil, and they withdrew the tax.

Even in the worst of life, Martin believed in giving thanks to God.

Do we believe the same?

It is often during the difficult wilderness times,

That we experience our greatest blessings, isn't it?

Wandering in the wilderness,

Shows us our need for God, right?

That's what the Deuteronomy passage today is talking about.

It is only when we are *in need*

that we realize *how much we need* God's help!

And how much *help God has given us in our time of need!*

You know, we each have our **own story**....of gratitude.

What is YOUR story—

When has God *helped you?*

And, how do you *give thanks* for YOUR story?

You may not consider your story very remarkable,

but we each have an amazing story to share,

of what God has done for us!
A story of gratitude, and thanks!

While the ***world tells stories*** of fear and destruction,
 we have a ***life-giving story*** to tell, of what Jesus has done in our lives.
 While the world shares stories of pain, we can share ***stories of grace***.
 While the world talks about ***fear or hatred***,
 We can talk about ***God's love***—
 While the world talks about ***scarcity***,
 We can talk about God's ***abundance, and blessings!***

And our stories-- inspire and encourage others,
 Because God is good--- All the time!

Despite our trials, there are ***ALWAYS blessings, right?***
 No matter how hard things get, there is ***ALWAYS reason for gratitude***,
 And ***ALWAYS the opportunity to give thanks!***

Often it's a habit—a choice.
Counting our blessings, even when we don't feel grateful.
 You know what happens? Eventually we start feeling the gratitude!

At ***Thanksgiving***, we often remember our blessings,
 even though we may be suffering and struggling.
 even though this is a season of loss—
 We're aware of the people who aren't with us around the table,
 Or sometimes we're aware of the difficult people who ARE around the table!

But we always have reason to be grateful!
 Not all the crazy relatives, or all the pain in the world
 can separate us from God's love and goodness!

So, we will be like the nine lepers who ran on to the Temple after Jesus healed
 them, and didn't look back?
 Or like the ***one Samaritan***, the outsider,
 Who ran back to Jesus, to thank him for being healed?

I've always wondered why some kept going, and didn't offer thanks?
And how often are we the same way?
 God opens a window for us, and we climb right through—

without saying thank you!

God gives us an amazing opportunity, and we assume we earned it.

God gives us a little nudge, a sign of grace, and we breeze right past it.

This is the power of sharing our God-sightings, or God-winks.

We all need to pay attention to our blessings.

Because so often we are like the nine, who kept on going!

It's easy to say we'll run back, and say thanks,

But sometimes our ***blessings are small,***

a sunset, a bit of laughter,

A smile of a child, a call from a neighbor,

a good day of worship—let's not overlook these gifts!

You know, when the Samaritan returned to Jesus, Jesus said to him

'your FAITH has made you well'.

Which is really interesting,

because he had ***already*** healed him of the leprosy.

And it was NOT conditional---he didn't demand faith first, then healing.

No, this man's gratitude IS his demonstration of faith.

His gratitude IS faith.

What if gratitude could be OUR demonstration of faith?

Gratitude is an attitude that changes our whole outlook on life.

Just think how others ***may need to hear YOUR story*** of gratitude.

Maybe even around your Thanksgiving table.

It might just be a turning point

in the life of someone you know,

or in your ***very own heart.***

Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel:

We have so many reasons to be grateful--

Because God is good, all the time. And all the time, God is good.

And for that, all God's people can say, Amen.