

Proper 23C: Saved and Grateful

1. Have you ever gone out of your way, really out of your way for someone who asked?
 - a. Maybe it was something on their house...maybe a big school project...something that took a lot of your effort...and in the end you didn't even get a thank you.
 - i. Perhaps they didn't mean it...maybe thanked you later but the initial effect was probably the same – somewhat upset
 - ii. Your reaction would be similar to our Lord's reaction upon healing the 10 lepers in our Gospel, **"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"** (Lk 17:17)
 - iii. What are some of the first things we teach our kids, how to say please and thank you and we're embarrassed when they don't
 - iv. Gratitude is often the only payment we ever receive and when it's not given we're surprised that they didn't acknowledge our efforts
 - b. Yet how many times do we do the very same thing to God?
 - i. After receiving an unexpected blessing, or even worse after an answer to prayer, we're often in the same position as 9 of these lepers – ungrateful
 - ii. Thankfulness is the response of a heart that trusts in God because it knows that we don't deserve anything good from Him.
 - iii. But in our sinful selfishness we have to be reminded often that God lavishes His gifts on us because of His grace and love not because we deserve it.
 - iv. But through the power of the Holy Spirit our response to those gifts can be that of the Samaritan leper - we are forgiven and grateful.
2. We hear a lot about leprosy in Scripture but it's something that's slipped from common memory in America – it's a slowly progressive disease marked by nerve damage and ulcerations of skin
 - a. But in Biblical times it rendered the affected person unclean and separated from the community according to Levitical Law
 - i. Lev 13:45-46 **"The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp."**
 - ii. They had to announce themselves to everyone around, a constant reminder of their status.
 - iii. But this served a practical purpose, there were no antibiotics in those days and to keep the infected person in the camp endangered all people
 - iv. In a very real sense these were the "walking dead" – they were cut off from society...cut off from the temple...dead physically and spiritually
 - b. This sounds extremely harsh to modern ears; how could a loving God treat the most unfortunate of His flock this way?
 - i. Israel was God's special people through whom the Messiah would come, they were separated by God from others to maintain their purity

- ii. Lev 20:26 - **“You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”**
 - iii. That also meant anything or anyone unclean from within was cast out
 - c. But in the Gospel we see that God in Christ has come into the world to restore the fallen order and heal what was broken.
 - i. When the lepers call out our Lord doesn’t revile them, as other rabbis and priests would do, but acknowledges them...heals with His Word
 - ii. He said, **"Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.** (Lk 17:14)
 - iii. The same God who created the world by nothing more than His Word restores health in the same way – God works through His Word.
 - d. Not only did the Lord save them from physical death and debility but He restored them spiritually
 - i. When the leprosy was cleansed, they were able to return to the Temple – the Kingdom of God was open to them!
 - ii. And yet 9 of 10 didn’t even acknowledge what the Lord had done, and they were Israelites – the ones who should have given thanks to God
 - iii. Of all people to acknowledge His work it was a Samaritan – the ones so despised by Jews, as Jesus says, **“Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”** (Luk 17:18)
 - iv. That is a common plot-twist in Luke’s Gospel, the ones who are least expected are the ones who show true faith and godliness like the parable of the Good Samaritan who rendered care when the other religious Israelites looked the other way.
- 3. Not surprisingly this episode is actually a picture of salvation – leprosy is a lot like sin the results are the same - separation
 - a. First, regarding heaven we find ourselves in the same position as the lepers in the Gospel, estranged...without hope of attaining eternal life – the walking dead
 - i. As we sang today - **Come in poverty and meanness, come defiled without, within; from infection and uncleanness, from the leprosy of sin**
 - ii. But Christ came into the world – true God born of woman - not only to physically heal but to restore the breach between God and man
 - iii. Not with mere words as He did here - no our healing cost Him much more than a few words
 - iv. Scripture says, **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”** (Gal 3:13) – Christ became the leprosy that is our sin!
 - b. And this Samaritan leper received more than just physical healing that day, he received salvation, unlike the other 9.
 - i. Shame on me I had never realized how explicit that was in Jesus’ words because of our English translation.

- ii. Most English texts, even in the venerable KJV, reads like our ESV, **“And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”** (Luk 17:19)
- iii. Yes, his faith had received Christ’s healing, he was made physically well, but that is not what the literal Greek text says.
- iv. Luke writes, **“Get up and go your way. Your faith has saved you,”** (Luk 17:19) – rarely do I disagree too much with translators especially conservative, well-regarded translations, but did we really need to translate that to say your faith has made you well vs it has save you?!
- c. Yet like the other 9 lepers the majority of the world, and sometimes even we, disregard what He’s done
 - i. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – the world stands forgiven by His work yet most refuse to acknowledge or thank
 - ii. Not only that but He continues to feed and nourish us, continues to take an interest in our lives, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”** (Jn 14:13)
 - iii. Our Lord promises to be intimately involved in our lives just for the asking
- d. The proper response of faith – for the one born of a living faith - is praise and thanksgiving, worship for all that we have received and continue to receive
 - i. Like the Samaritan when he, **“saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.”** (Lk 17:15-16) – we are forgiven and grateful!
 - ii. Says Luther about this verse, **“That is true worship: to return and praise God with a loud voice, which is the greatest work in heaven and in earth, the only thing we can show God. Anything else we dare not, are not even capable of it, but He loves to be loved and be praised by us. . . . How few there are that return, hardly one out of ten!”**
 - iii. For all that our Lord has done and continues to do for you lift up your voice in thanksgiving with the cleansed Samaritan leper – you are forgiven be grateful!