

A Life of Joyful Thanks and Praise

Meditation on Luke 17:11-19

Oct. 9, 2016

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers 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' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

So, it has been an interesting week. I have now experienced my first hurricane with you. When I was offered the call to Merritt Island last year, the one question I failed to ask the PNC was, "What about the hurricanes?"

I learned that everything in the yard that isn't rooted or cemented needs to be brought inside or otherwise secured. I was advised, if we didn't have windows covered with hurricane shutters or plywood, that we should at least tape them so glass wouldn't fly everywhere if the windows broke. These are what some of the houses in our neighborhood looked like before the storm. We planned on being without power and water for several days, stocking up on batteries, candles, matches and drinking water. Melvyn the cat wasn't worried at all!

On Wednesday--a few hours before the evacuation of the beaches and barrier islands--Leslie and I finished the bulletins for today. Then I stood looking around my office, wondering what I should do next to protect it from hurricane Matthew. I took all that was stored close to the floor and put it up on shelves or tables, including the stuffed animals I keep for visiting children. I packed and took home my computer, my wedding picture and children's baby pictures, and all my garments for worship--my stoles, gold cross, and white alb. I left everything else! I knew that whatever happened, I would be leading worship somewhere, somehow, on Sunday and every Sunday after that. We would, whatever happened, lift our voices in joyful praise, giving thanks to the merciful God who loves us and sent His Son to die for us. For there is nothing more precious than our salvation--the promise of new, abundant and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

To live as people of faith means that **we live lives of joyful thanks and praise**--to the glory of our God. *To fail to be grateful for what God has done for us* is to fail to be faithful to the call of Jesus Christ!

Our gospel lesson in Luke today reminds us of what is truly valuable for all eternity. On the surface, the account of the 10 lepers seems to be another healing story. And it is. But it's also about the power of faith and the mercy of God, who loves even those whom society has deemed worthless. And there's another important lesson here.

But let's start at the beginning. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem--meaning not just the place, but His destiny--suffering, dying on a cross

and being resurrected from the dead--to fulfill God's purpose-- redeem the world from its sins. Samaria, the home of those who are enemies of the Jewish people, is mentioned alongside Galilee, the region that was home to Jesus and his disciples. He is about to enter an unnamed "certain village," which could be a Samaritan village, like the one Jesus sent messengers to in Luke 9:52. They refuse to welcome him because he is on his way to Jerusalem, the Holy City for the Jewish people. The Samaritans didn't worship God at the Temple in Jerusalem; they worshiped God on Mt. Gerizim.

As Jesus and his disciples enter the village, 10 people with leprosy "meet" him and call out to him from a distance. They call Jesus "Master"--so they must know his identity and his reputation for miracles. Jesus cleansed a leper in Luke 5:12-14: ¹² Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." ¹³ Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴ And he ordered him to tell no one. "Go," he said, "and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them."

The 10 lepers don't ask for healing or to be "made clean." They ask for mercy--an act of kindness and grace; forgiveness that is *undeserved*. Leprosy is seen as a divine curse. The leper or his or her parents must have sinned against God to be afflicted with the disease. Leprosy would mean social isolation and poverty, for they could not live or work amongst other people, including their own families; they could not

worship in the Temple or synagogue. They remain at a distance not just because they are contagious but because they are “unclean” and could defile others if they come too close. The priestly ritual for the leper to become “clean” after they are healed of their disease is detailed in 32 verses in Leviticus 14.

Jesus doesn't touch the lepers as he did in chapter 5; he looks at them and simply tells them to “go, *show* themselves to the priests.” Their act of *going* is an act of faith and obedience, for they would not present themselves to the priests unless they *had already been* healed. As they go, they are not just healed, they are “made clean,” without any priestly sacrifice or rituals. Faith in Jesus will become *the only sacrifice* anyone will ever need to be made clean. Only one of the lepers, when he sees that he has been cured, turns back and falls at Jesus' feet, praising God in a “loud voice” and thanking him. That's when the audience of Jesus' time is stunned to learn that this one who has turned back to Jesus in gratitude and joy isn't Jewish; he is a Samaritan! “Were not 10 made clean?” Jesus asks his disciples. “Where are the other nine?” “Can it be that none has been found to come back and give praise or glory to God except this foreigner?” Or, as some translations say, this “outsider” or “stranger”? The disciples say nothing. They are dumbfounded at what Jesus has just said about a Samaritan being the only one to do what is right. This challenges their view of their world where they are the good ones--and everyone else outside their religious community is “unclean.” Strange, how people nowadays can think the same way, even though God loves ALL people of ALL faiths, just the same! Jesus turns to the Samaritan. “Get up and go on your way,” he says, leaving us to wonder

where the Samaritan's way will be--now that he has experienced Christ's healing and has a new understanding of God, who isn't just far off, waiting on a mountain or in a Temple to be worshiped, but is in the person of Jesus Christ, standing right in front of him, caring for a stranger, an outsider, in his time of need. Would this Samaritan be like the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, whose encounter with Jesus leads her to tell everyone in her village, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" Many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus the Messiah because of her testimony.

The final phrase of this passage: "your faith has made you well," has often been misunderstood. Over the years, some Christians have told people who fail to experience physical healing that the problem is that they don't have enough faith. This can't be further than the truth! The man's healing was a gift from Jesus to all 10 lepers who sought his mercy. The faith that made the one leper "well" was not faith for a physical healing, for all 10 lepers received that! The words translated "made you well" literally mean "saved you." The Samaritan's faith that *brought him salvation* was demonstrated with his grateful, joyful response to God's mercy, *revealed in Jesus Christ*.

After the storm, I worried what we might find when we went outside in our yard. What we found was evidence that, yes, a fierce storm had come through, but without damaging our home at all. Today, we worship in a beautiful building that did not sustain major damage. Praise the Lord! Thank you, God!! But if we **had** sustained damage or

even lost our worship home, we would still come together to give thanks to the God who loves us and sent His Son to die for us. For there is nothing more valuable to us than our salvation--the promise of new, abundant and eternal life in Jesus Christ. To live as people of faith means that **we live lives of joyful thanks and praise**--to the glory of our God. To fail to be grateful for what God has done for us is to fail to be faithful to the call of Jesus Christ!

The day of the storm, a friend asked that I post something on Facebook to encourage people who were feeling afraid. I wrote this:

“Dear friends, Hope you are in a safe place and are prepared--or getting prepared--for the storm. Please remember that wherever we go, whatever we do, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are always "at home" with Jesus, though we may have had to evacuate our homes on the island or beach, for now. Remember how God has always been faithful to care for you and your families in the past. That although the storms may rage around us, Christ Jesus is always our peace. This is the God who commands the wind and the waves, "Peace! Be Still!" The Spirit that lives within us will remain with us and strengthen us with wisdom, love and even joy during the most difficult trials. The Church is not the building, though we love our worship home. The Body of Christ is eternal. We will never die! And now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with every good thing to do His will. And may He accomplish in us what is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Let us pray. Holy One, we praise and thank you for your love, mercy and grace for a world of sinners, in need of your salvation. Thank you for your precious gift of a saving faith to all who seek you and trust you as their Lord. Forgive us for fretting over small things when we have all that we need with your Son, Jesus Christ, and our promise of new, abundant and eternal life in Him. Thank you for sparing our church buildings and our homes, Lord, from serious damage. Thank you for protecting us and our loved ones from harm. We ask that you would be with those who are suffering from great loss in the wake of hurricane Matthew--lost homes, belongings, family and friends. Comfort and heal them. Provide for their needs through friends and strangers, like us. Lead us to help our neighbors and to live lives of joyful thanks and praise, no matter what our circumstances, shining your light and sharing our hope with the world. In Christ we pray. Amen.