

Series: Generosity
Title: Grounded in Gratitude
Luke 17:11-19
October 27, 2019

Kent Millard is now a retired United Methodist pastor who served for 18 years as the Senior Pastor of one of the 10 largest UMC's -- St Luke's UMC in Indianapolis, IN. Before being appointed to St. Luke's he had served as a District Superintendent in South Dakota. But the appointment as a D.S. required that the family had to relocate. And as sometimes happens in such a move, not everyone in the family was happy about moving. Kent's grade school age son Kendall absolutely did not want to move to a new community and leave behind his friends – and he made it clear that he was very unhappy about the move.

- However, when the Millard family arrived at their new home, a parsonage provided by the district, Kendall was shocked by what he found already set up in the living room awaiting him. It was a beautiful electric train set. And lying on top of it was a note to Kendall that read, *“This is a gift from the Reuben Job family to Kendall. Hope you enjoy your new home.”*
- You can imagine the shock and excitement from young Kendall to find such a wonderful gift from a family he didn't even know. He played with that electric train all day long. The next day, Kendall came into his father's home office with his hands full of coins and plopped them down on his dad's desk and said, *“Dad, give this to God.”* Kent was surprised by his son's spontaneous offering and so he asked him, *“Why are you giving this money to God?”* The child answered, *“Just to say thanks.”*

Kendall has received a generous gift from a kind pastor and he was so overwhelmed with gratitude that he wanted to give an offering to God *“just to say thanks.”* Young Kendall Millard was grounded in gratitude!

The truth is that all of us have received abundant gifts from the hands of our generous God. God has filled us with the blessings of life and love, family and friends, a community and congregation, relationships and resources.

In the book *Climb Higher* the authors write:

- True inspiration to give and be generous occurs when we realize that all we have and all we are is a gift from God. When we acknowledge God's abundant gifts, we become grateful. Gratitude incites generosity. In fact,

a truly grateful heart will have no alternative but to be a giving and generous heart. (Pg. 41)

We are calling today “Gratitude Sunday” as we kick-off our “Expanding Our Reach, Deepening Our Roots” building campaign.

The question before us this morning is how do we tell God “Thank you?”

- When we consider all the generous gifts God has given us, how do we respond? Do we live our lives as if God has done nothing for us?
- Or do our lives reflect that we are “Grounded in Gratitude?”

And when it comes to reflecting on these questions, I don’t suppose there is a better story in the Bible than our lesson from the Gospel of Luke today.

The story begins with Jesus on the outskirts of a village where ten men with leprosy met him. We are told that they stood at a distance and yelled to him, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us.” (v 12)

Don't ever think for a moment that death is the worst thing that can happen to a person. It's not. And the scene this morning is a case in point. These ten men walked the earth. They breathed and ate. They had hopes and fears and aspirations and feelings just like you and me. Yet, there was a tragic sense in which they were already dead. They were walking dead. Leprosy was the most dreaded of all ancient diseases. It ate away at the body and left its victim maimed and disfigured. There was no known cure. In their hopes for a family life, a useful occupation, plans for the future-they were dead men.

Their situation was made worse because leprosy was believed to be highly contagious. Actually, we know today that it is not. But tell that to ancient superstition. The scripture made it quite clear that as these lepers approached Jesus they stood at a far distance. Religious law clearly prescribed that a leper could not get within fifty yards of a clean person. Everywhere these poor men journeyed they heard familiar words yelled out: "Unclean," "Leper." And then some would hurl stones at them to keep them away. Leprosy was a serious public health concern but it was tinged with the religious element of ritual uncleanness – it was thought that they were sinful people and leprosy was part of their punishment. So it was that they not only had to live with their physical handicap, but they were also isolated. They had to live in the hell of loneliness. That can do more to drain a person's energy for living than the most horrible of diseases.

But even in the midst of this horrible situation these lepers had something to be thankful for. In their common misery they had banded together. They had found each other. It is interesting to note that one of these ten lepers was a Samaritan. Now a good Jew in that day in time would have no dealings at all with a Samaritan. They looked upon Samaritans as dogs, half-breeds, and heretics. Yet, in the common misery of their leprosy these men had forgotten that they were Jew and Samaritan and realized only that they were men in need.

I.

And that brings us to the first point of our story: **even in the worst of circumstances, those “Grounded in Gratitude” can always find something to be thankful for.**

We know from reading the Book of Acts that the Church in Thessalonica was under persecution for their faith in Jesus. Christians were being beaten by mobs and falsely accused of crime of treason for saying that “Jesus is Lord.” In fact, we are told that the Apostle Paul and Silas had to escape Thessalonica by the cover of night.

And yet to this Church severely suffering for its faith, Paul would write in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- **(1 Thess. 5:16-18) ¹⁶ Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus**

I would point out that the Paul says “give thanks IN all circumstances” and not FOR all circumstances.

- Perhaps Daniel Defoe shows us how we can give thanks “IN” all circumstances through his fictitious character Robinson Crusoe. The first thing that Crusoe did when he found himself on a deserted island was to make out a list. On one side of the list he wrote down all his problems. On the other side of the list he wrote down all of his blessings. *On one side he wrote: I do not have any clothes. On the other side he wrote: But it's warm and I don't really need any. On one side he wrote: All of the provisions were lost. On the other side he wrote: But there's plenty of fresh fruit and water on the island.* And on down the list he went. In this fashion he discovered that for every negative aspect about his situation, there was a positive aspect, something to be thankful for. It is easy to find ourselves on an island of despair. Perhaps it is time that we sit down and take an inventory of our blessings.

And that's what it means to be "Grounded in Gratitude", that no matter how difficult the circumstances, we can always find something to be thankful for – whether it's an electric train set, or the gift of life.

II.

That is the first lesson. But we cannot stop there. Finding reasons to be grateful is well and good but the second lesson of the story is far more important: **In the midst of problems thanksgiving needs to be expressed so that we can be made whole.**

After this group of lepers approached him with the words: "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*" Jesus responded: "*Go show yourselves to the priests.*"

- Initially that may sound strange to us, but the fact is that the priests of that day were also public health officers. If a person had been cured from an infectious disease, he had to present himself to the priest to receive a health certificate. No doubt the lepers were puzzled by Jesus' command. To say that it was premature was an understatement. Why bother to get a certificate of health when you haven't been cured? Yet, they believed his words and they did as he commanded. They all showed that they had faith in Jesus' power to cure them, because all 10 left to go show themselves to the priest.

And then something truly remarkable happens. We are told in **verse 14** "**As they went, they were cleansed.**"

- The wretched sores that scarred their hands and faces vanished. The numbness in their limbs was gone. Strength returned to their bodies. As they obeyed the command of Christ, their longing for healing had come.

And how do these 10 men respond to miraculous healing? To this generous gift from God?

- We have to say we don't know about 9 of them, because we never hear from them again. But one of them, when he sees he has been healed, runs back to Jesus "Praising God." And he throws himself at Jesus feet and thanks him for the healing – and we are told that he was a Samaritan. It was the heretic who came back to thank Jesus and give God praise.

This prompts Jesus to say in verses 17 & 18:

- **17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"**

What a pitiful revelation of human nature. What rank ingratitude. Surely this is not typical! This can't be a picture of 90% of the people in the world. But then again... We now live in a world in which there are more hungry people than there were people 100 years ago. Yet, according to a gallop Poll nine out of ten American families sat down to their Thanksgiving dinners this past week and did not utter a prayer.

Jesus said: "Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

And then notice what Jesus says to this one man in verse 19, **"19 Then [Jesus] said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."**

- Your faith has made you well? But weren't all 10 healed? Yes...but there is a difference between being healed physically and made well.
 - Greek word "well" is *sozo*. The word means well, whole and saved.
 - Romans 10 the word is used twice
 - Romans 10:9 "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved [*sozo*]."
 - Romans 10:13 "for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved [*sozo*]."

In verse 15, the word "healed" is *ioumai* which means a physical healing. And when Jesus says to the Samaritan, "Your faith has made you well," the word is *sozo*.

It's only when we are "Grounded in Gratitude" so that we can give thanksgiving "in all circumstances" that we find that we are made whole – that we are saved.

So let me ask you, What are you thankful for? What do you need to "praise God" for? Where do you need to be grounded in gratitude?

Even in the worst of circumstances, those "Grounded in Gratitude" can always find something to be thankful for. And in the midst of problems, those "Grounded in Gratitude" need to express thanksgiving, because that is how we are made whole.