

Preacher: Rev. Reebee Girash
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SCRIPTURE Luke 17:11-19

11 On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him. Keeping their distance from him, 13 they raised their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, show us mercy!"

14 When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they left, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. 16 He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus replied, "Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?" 19 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."

Common English Bible translation

Sermon

"I'm grateful."

That's what he says, whenever someone asks, how are you?

Every time, this is how the conversation with him starts. You ask him that throw away question, expecting to just keep on going with their day, and his reply stops you.

If you know him well at all, you know he's been through some things. If you don't know him well, you just see a little limp. You hear a rumor about a hard time, a while back. You see a wisdom born from experience in his eyes.

I'm grateful, he says, and then he says why. I'm grateful. I'm up and walking again. I'm grateful, I found a good meeting. I'm grateful, because I'm loved. I'm grateful, because today, I have enough. I'm grateful, because I've found my people.

And then you realize, you're standing next to him, dropping food at the food pantry. Getting ready to teach Sunday School. Making the coffee. You have to wonder if gratitude is what got him here.

"Gratitude is... a response to the blessings of life, but it is also a choice to see those blessings, name them, and express our gratitude in word and deed. And giving voice to gratitude is a choice with consequences, for as we express our gratitude, we affect those around us, even shape the reality in which we live."¹

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There are ten people healed, and one returns to praise God and thank Jesus. Let's consider this story from Luke 17.

This is a border story.
And this is a story of being seen and known.
And this is a story of gratitude.

The Common English Bible (unlike my usual NRSV) makes clear what Luke means about where Jesus was when he encountered these ten people. Other translations say, he passed through the region between Galilee and Samaria, but that doesn't make sense, there's no "region"

there, just a border between two somewhat antagonistic communities. Mostly, Jewish travelers would have skirted around Samaria. And why would Jesus have walked east/west along the border when his destination was due south? Luke wants us to know Jesus chose to linger at the border, chose to be in an in-between place, at a place between sickness and wholeness, a place between unclean and clean, a place between isolation and community, a place between religious groups. Jesus chose to walk the border in order to bridge a boundary and make people whole. This is theological geography.² As Dennis Sanders puts it,

These ten men “...don’t want to be on the unclean side—they want, they need, to be healed. They are tired of being separated from family and friends. Then Jesus shows up at the border.”³

Listen, also, to the way these people are described by Luke: Ten men with skin diseases...

Jesus saw them...

One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. 16 He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan.

Many English translations describe this group of folks as “ten lepers”. But the Greek calls them men first, ten men with leprosy. Think of this as a first century version of the language suggested by the disability rights movement. We begin by affirming the humanity of an individual, and only then add a comment about the tools they use or the diagnosis with which they deal.⁴

Luke tells us first that he was a man, second that he had a skin disease. Jesus saw him and the other nine men, saw them not just as a disease but as people. Having been seen, healed, cleansed, and invited into community, this man praised God and thanked Jesus. And only after all these aspects of his humanity come forward, only then, does Luke tell us: he was a Samaritan.

In Luke’s time, people with skin diseases were isolated, unclean, banned from community. There was a sense in which visible disease must be caused by immorality or bad behavior, and an assumption that those who prayed hard enough, believed enough, would be healed. That assumption still runs through our cultural DNA.

On top of the isolation of disease, Samaritans were divided from Jews by hundreds of years of complex history.

But Jesus never excluded those whom society marginalized, he spent plenty of time with Samaritans, and he did not subscribe to the notion that illness was a sign of moral failing. So he went into the liminal space, reached across the border and welcomed these ten men into community. For the tenth, the man from Samaria, it was not only a physical healing, it was a proclamation of dignity and wholeness.

The Gospels are often about figuring out who the community includes, and here’s Jesus once again saying the community includes everyone who wants to be here.

This tenth man, doubly isolated, who is welcomed into community for the first time in forever. Wendell Berry says, “Healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness.” That’s what healing was to this man, not just new movement in his joints and clearer skin, but the opposite of loneliness.

The other nine men, part of the Jewish community, got healed by Jesus and then by virtue of their trip to the Temple, were back in their own circle. They followed the rules of their tradition,

and we don't know what other ways in which they expressed gratitude. The tenth man, from Samaria, was not just healed by Jesus but offered community by Jesus.

Do you know how good it is, when you find your people?

Perhaps this is the reason for his over the top, extraordinary, joyful gratitude, why he "praised God with a loud voice and fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him."

If you are seen, if someone reaches across the border and invites you in, Of course you would be grateful. This beloved child of God, a Samaritan with a skin disease, was not just healed and cleansed. He was included and granted dignity. If this were you, Of course you would praise God for the gift of this one who healed you and saw you as a whole and dignified person.

Well, I say, of course we would be grateful. But, expressing gratitude in this bold way was a choice. There was no of course about it. Shouting out about the bold new thing that Jesus had done was a choice. He saw that he had been healed, restored, seen, invited, and his response was lavish and unrestrained gratitude. He fell on his knees before Jesus, just to say thank you. He chose to show gratitude, where nine did not.

Jesus asked why he was the only one to show gratitude. I can hear the air quotes, when Jesus asked, "No one returned to praise God except this 'foreigner'?"

And then Jesus said, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."

I wonder if Jesus' benediction was more of a commission. Maybe this man took the healing and restoration Jesus gave and extended it. Perhaps this man became one whose life was grounded in gratitude, one whose path was joyful and extravagant, one who saw the beauty and dignity of God's beautiful and beloved children from every region and nationality, because his own beauty and dignity had been recognized.

One who crossed borders to welcome and heal, grateful he had been invited and restored. Perceiving the amazing new thing that had been done in him, I imagine his gratitude spilled over to everyone he met.

This is our call and commission, too.

Now, some of us are the folks standing just outside the doors, just over the border, wounded and in need of healing and welcome. Some of us have not yet heard a healing word, have not been invited, have not yet been called beloved and beautiful. Some of us feel un-seen. some of us are on the margins economically, culturally, socially. I want to tell you that if you are in that number, this is my hope and this is our aspiration as a community: to extend our hand across the border, to see you and to welcome you.

For those of us who can see the blessings of our lives, who have been welcomed, who have things to be grateful for.

We can choose a life grounded in gratitude, a path joyful and extravagant.

We have the chance to look for the beauty and dignity of God's beautiful and beloved children from every region and nationality.

We have the choice to cross borders and extend hands to welcome and heal,

Perceiving the amazing new thing that had been done in us, we have the choice to let gratitude spill over to everyone we meet.

Maya Angelou said, "As soon as healing takes place, go out and heal somebody else." As much as he sent this healed man forth, Jesus sends us forth. Our faith has healed us. What will we do with that?

Amen.

1 This quote is from David Lose at <https://www.davidlose.net/2016/10/pentecost-21-c-gratitude-and-grace/>, and the story told above is inspired by one he tells in that article.

2 Fred Craddock uses this phrase in the Interpretation Bible Commentary on Luke, page 202.

3 <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/living-word/october-13-ordinary...>

4 <https://www.lifecil.org/community-resources/disability-etiquette/>