

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church(ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

October 9, 2022 (Proper 23, Year C)
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c
Luke 17:11-19

One day a busy little two-year-old named Sarah interrupted her play-time, just long enough to run into the kitchen to search for an afternoon snack. She said to her mother: "Banana, Momma, Banana!"

Her mom handed her a banana. Sarah quickly grabbed it and turned to rush back out of the kitchen, but before she got far, her mother said: "Sarah, come back. What are the magic words?"

Sarah screeched to a halt, turned back around and said: "Please! Thank You! You're Welcome! God Bless You! And I Love You, Mommy!"

Well for that, Sarah got a hug too!

The magic words Sarah's mom was looking for were "Thank you." She got more than that, but THOSE were the words she was looking for, because Sarah's mom knew how important it is for us to learn how to stop and say "thank you."

We all understand the importance of gratitude, how it can radically change relationships. And we all CERTAINLY know as ADULTS that we appreciate BEING thanked. Yet, when it comes to giving thanks to GOD, we so often miss the mark. So, let me ask you: Is saying "thank you" just for KIDS?

We have in our readings today two stories about foreigners. Naaman is a Syrian general – not ONLY a foreigner, but even an ENEMY. The leper that returns to JESUS is a SAMARITAN, and you KNOW how much the Jews hated THEM. A good Jew in that day would have no dealings at ALL with a Samaritan. They looked upon them as half-breeds, dogs.

And worse, he was a leper. Both Naaman and he were DOUBLE outsiders. It says as the ten lepers approached Jesus, they stood at a distance and shouted. Jewish law clearly prescribed that a leper couldn't get within FIFTY YARDS of a clean person. Leprosy was a serious public health concern, but it was ALSO tinged with the religious element of RITUAL UNCLEANNESS. That's why Jesus tells the lepers to go see the PRIESTS, because ONLY a priest could certify that they had been cleansed from their leprosy and could return to their families. Unless that happened, everywhere these poor men went, they would continue to hear the familiar words yelled: "Unclean," "Leper." And some would hurl stones at them to keep them away.

These stories are about OUTSIDERS, FOREIGNERS, to put it KINDLY. And yet, HAVING been healed, having RECEIVED a blessing from God, Naaman and the Samaritan RETURNED to give praise and thanks. In doing so, they LEAD us to ask an important question: Is it a FOREIGN concept to GIVE THANKS? Is it just for OUTCASTS and CHILDREN?

Jesus asked, "Weren't ten made clean? Where are the other nine?" That's a good question: where WERE they? Why did only ONE cleansed leper return to thank Jesus?

All ten were HEALED, but only one RECOGNIZED the healing for what it really was. Maybe the others thought they DESERVED to be healed and didn't NEED to thank anyone. But ONE DID.

Or maybe they WERE grateful, but got caught up in the healing ITSELF and didn't THINK to thank Jesus. But ONE DID.

Or maybe those nine Lepers WANTED to return and give thanks, but not before the other things they had to do, not right away, not at that MOMENT. But ONE DID.

We're pretty hard on those UNGRATEFUL lepers, but THEIR reasons for not returning and giving thanks to God, WHATEVER they were, probably weren't much different than OURS. What are

OUR reasons? Every breath we take is a gift. Why don't WE give thanks to God more OFTEN? We have SO much to be grateful FOR, if only we would SEE it.

It says that one of the lepers "saw that he was healed." Surely, all 10 of them NOTICED. And surely the healing STUCK. Jesus didn't take it back. But only ONE of the lepers, not only SAW that he was healed, he saw God's HAND BEHIND it. He SAW that it was a gift of God's mercy and grace. And he PRAISED God, and he returned to Jesus and he THANKED him. He fell on his knees at Jesus' feet and worshipped him.

The others were grateful FOR something; he was grateful TO somebody, to Jesus.

Jesus PRAISES this one. He says, "Your faith has made you well." Now, that means more than you might think. All TEN of the lepers were HEALED, simply by the GRACE of Jesus, but only ONE was made WHOLE. The word we translate as, "has made you well," is the SAME word that means "saved." Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you." SEEING his healing for what it Was, SEEING it as a GIFT from God, was an act of FAITH, and that faith SAVED him.

Anyone can come to Jesus, anyone can be blessed by God, and you ARE blessed in countless ways, but that's only the BEGINNING of what Jesus wants to give you. He wants much MORE for you. He wants you know peace in your life, to know contentment, to know purpose, to know joy, to know HIM. He wants you to be WHOLE. ALL TEN of those lepers got what they PRAYED for, but this ONE received MORE than he'd ever DREAMED of even ASKING for. The difference was a grateful heart.

A good friend of mine sent me this piece. It's called "The Best Day Of My Life!" The author is unknown.

Today, when I awoke, I suddenly realized that this is the best day of my life, ever!

There were times when I wondered if I would make it to today; but I did!

And because I did, I'm going to celebrate!

Today, I'm going to celebrate what an unbelievable life I have had so far: the accomplishments, the many blessings, and, yes, even the hardships because they have served to make me stronger.

I will go through this day with my head held high and a happy heart.

I will marvel at God's seemingly simple gifts: the morning dew, the sun, the clouds, the trees, the flowers, the birds.

Today, none of these miraculous creations will escape my notice.

Today, I will share my excitement for life with other people. I'll make someone smile. I'll go out of my way to perform an unexpected act of kindness for someone I don't even know.

Today, I'll give a sincere compliment to someone who seems down.

I'll tell a child how special he is, and I'll tell someone I love just how deeply I care for them and how much they mean to me.

Today is the day I quit worrying about what I don't have and start being grateful for all the wonderful things God has already given me.

I'll remember that to worry is just a waste of time because my faith in God and His Divine Plan ensures everything will be just fine.

Tonight, before I go to bed, I'll go outside and raise my eyes to the heavens. I will stand in awe at the beauty of the stars and the moon, and I will praise God for these magnificent treasures.

As the day ends and I lay my head down on my pillow, I will thank the Almighty for the best day of my life. And I will sleep the sleep of a contented child, excited with expectation because I know tomorrow is going to be

The Best Day Of My Life!

When you look at YOUR life, what do YOU see? What are you GRATEFUL for? More importantly, WHO are you grateful TO? Do you SEE what GOD has done? Amen.