

Sermon – 10/13/19
Luke 17:11-19

Once upon a time, there were two men, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Thompson, both seriously ill in the same room of a great hospital. Both had to be kept unusually quiet and still - no reading, no radio, certainly no television and no visitors. Their only entertainment was to talk to each other.

Mr. Thompson had to spend all his time flat on his back. Mr. Wilson, on the other hand, as part of his treatment, was allowed to sit up in bed for an hour each day. His bed was next to the window, and every afternoon, when he was propped up for his hour, he would pass the time by describing to Mr. Thompson what he could see outside. And Mr. Thompson began to live for those hours. Mr. Wilson would look out the window and describe ...

- a beautiful park with a lake where there were ducks and swans and children throwing them bread and sailing model boats;
- softball games and football games and kites flying;
- flowers and trees and stretches of grass and young lovers walking hand-in-hand;
- the skyline of the city off in the distance and the cars and horse-drawn carriages making their way through the park.

One day, there was a parade, and Mr. Wilson described every float, every band and all the participants in the procession. Mr. Thompson listened intently, enjoying every minute. He could visualize everything Mr. Wilson described.

Then one afternoon, Mr. Thompson thought to himself: "Just wait a minute! Why should Wilson have all the fun? Why does he have all the pleasure? Why does he get to be by the window?" In a few days, Mr. Thompson turned sour. He was bitter, angry, resentful. He brooded and seethed. He became obsessed with wanting to be by the window! And each passing hour, he became more and more resentful of Mr. Wilson.

Then one night, quite suddenly, Mr. Wilson died. His body was taken away the next morning. As soon as it seemed decent, Mr.

Thompson asked if he could be moved to the bed next to the window. So they moved him, tucked him in, made him quite comfortable and left him alone. The minute they'd gone, Mr. Thompson struggled to prop himself up on one elbow so he could look out the window. Imagine his surprise. It faced a blank brick wall!

In our story from Luke's gospel today, we hear about the ten lepers who petitioned Jesus for healing – calling out to Him as they were required to do. Jesus hears them and sees them and feels a desire to be merciful toward them. Then he gives them a rather unusual command: “Go and show yourselves to the priests” (v. 14). To us, these words sound odd, but in the time of Jesus a leper who was fortunate enough to be healed had to show himself to a priest. Only a priest could certify that a person was truly clean and able to return to the community.

Something is going on here, something wonderful and mysterious and tingling with the healing power of God. As the lepers make their way toward the priests, they are miraculously cleansed, and one of them, Leper No. 10, turns on his heels and races back to Jesus, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrates himself at Jesus' feet and thanks him profusely (vv. 14-16).

Our story today from the gospel of Luke seems a no-brainer: like one you can phone in. Ten lepers get cured. One comes back. Who was most thankful? It's the Samaritan, the outsider. Don't prejudge someone just because of their background. End of story.

But it's a little more complicated. The other nine were doing their churchy duty. According to the law of Moses, when you were cured you went to the priest in order to certify the matter so you could rejoin society. More important -- they were obeying Jesus. He was the one who told them to do their churchy duty! You can't go wrong doing what Jesus told you to do? Right?

Maybe not so easy. Sometimes we read the Bible without really thinking about it. Sometimes we read the Bible as if it were written in the clouds and had no application to the daily life of Jesus and His disciples and the people who heard Him. Only one gives thanks. One out of 10. “Were not ten made clean?” asks Jesus, sounding miffed. “But the other nine, where are they?” (v. 17). Jesus was funny and did tell jokes – jokes that His hearers would have

understood for their humor. Things can get lost in translation. “You had to be there.” Perhaps Jesus is being a little sassy here? There may be more here than meets the eye – or the ear.

I suspect everyone here would say they want to follow and obey Jesus, but aren't we sometimes satisfied with just doing our churchy duty? We read something in the Bible, or hear something from the pulpit, and figure out this is the least we can do, the absolute least we can do, and still be righteous. I wonder if this story teaches us that sometimes it's not enough to be good, or right!

There were ten lepers. All ten received healing, but only one came back. Why would he do that? What does the leper who returned receive that the other nine do not? The others seem to have experienced cleansing, but this leper receives more. What more does this leper receive from Jesus that the others do not? What causes him to do more than what Jesus had told them all to do?

A recent Barna Research poll revealed that despite international tensions and domestic economic problems, nine out of 10 Americans are happy with their lives and say that their religious faith has a lot to do with it. Nine out of 10 Americans are happy, and they credit their faith. That's an impressive statistic, but does it mean that nine out of 10 regularly turn to God and give thanks? We may feel good about our lives, but we don't always give credit where credit is due.

If we can remember to be grateful, we'll find ourselves even healthier in body, mind and spirit. We'll feel better about our lives, more optimistic about our prospects and more helpful toward people around us.

Psychology Today agrees: “Gratitude is an emotion expressing appreciation for what one has -- as opposed to, say, a consumer-oriented emphasis on what one wants or needs -- and is currently receiving a great deal of attention as a facet of positive psychology. Gratitude is what gets poured into the glass to make it half full. Studies show that gratitude not only can be deliberately cultivated but can increase levels of well-being and happiness among those who do cultivate it. In addition, grateful thinking -- and especially

expression of it to others -- is associated with increased levels of energy, optimism, and empathy."

Jesus proclaimed it, and modern research confirms it — a grateful faith can make us well.

Thanksgiving Day is coming up. What would you do in case there's an 'exploding turkey'?

"What if the whole family was together at Thanksgiving and the turkey exploded?" "If all of you were killed at that moment, who would you want to have your worldly goods?"

That may be a terrific assignment for all of us: a chance to think about the people in our lives, a chance to be grateful and express our gratitude.

Have you ever tried to make a ritual of stopping at the end of the day, even a particularly difficult day, and making a list: a gratitude list? Who or what do I have to be grateful for today?

That's why you have a blank sheet of paper in your bulletin this morning. We are going to take a few minutes now to play the role of the Samaritan by returning to the one person who has been a healing force and presence in your life. Many of us will think of our parents. For the purpose of this exercise, let's assume that our parents have been there for us as the wonderful parents they are. Let's go beyond the parental influence to that of a friend, teacher or mentor.

Please do three things: Write the name of this person on this paper. Then, jot down a brief paragraph summarizing this person's role in bringing cleansing and wholeness to your life and express your gratitude for him or her. Finally, covenant with me to contact this person during the week to share your thoughts.

We will do this exercise in holy quietness. We won't even fill the silence with piano music. Let the holy hush be a part of the experience.

It is a good and healthy thing to count our blessings every day: one by one. Remember to be grateful. Realize how rich you are. Take the time, every day, to give thanks for everything you have been given. You will be healthier for it: in mind, body and spirit.