

Luke 17:11-19 - The 10 Lepers

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Sermon – Sun, October 9, 2022 - Thanksgiving

Our Gospel says

‘...**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...Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ... Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

This morning I am going to talk to you about gratefulness; gratefulness and how it makes us whole.

Have you ever been worried as you’ve waited for news of a loved one? Is it a tumour? Does my loved one need surgery...is it cancer...only to find out that everything is all right. Have you ever found that as quickly as your anxiety dissolves, you turn to another worry, before you’ve really digested the good news?

It’s quite common, as we see in this morning’s Gospel; this inability to take a moment to **appreciate the gift**. Only one realized what had actually taken place. Because he’d gone back to give thanks, our Lord said ‘ not only are you ‘clean’, but you are **well**’. The Greek word used here for ‘well’ also means ‘**saved**’. It is crucial this gratefulness, this ‘thank you’ of the one in ten leper. It is crucial because it brings the leper back to our Lord Jesus and to the realization that it is through our Lord’s compassion that he has been restored.

Bill Stidger was one of the first radio preachers in the mid-1930s. He had a radio audience of half a million listeners. Stidger regularly sent people notes of thanks. So one day he wrote a note to thank one of his former teachers. He wasn't sure where she lived, but he addressed his note as best he could.

That note finally reached Stidger's teacher. When she received it, she wrote this response:

"My Dear Willie:
I am an old lady in my eighties. I am ill and I cannot leave my room.
Your letter came like a ray of bright sun, illuminating my dark day and my even darker life.
You will be interested to know that, after fifty years of teaching, yours was the first letter of thanks I ever received from a former student.
You lifted the clouds for me."

**after fifty years of teaching,
his was the first letter of thanks she had ever received**

My guess is there is probably a letter of thanks each of us could write today?

Leif Hass, M.D., is a family medicine doctor who works at hospitals in Oakland, CA. He wrote this about gratitude.

At 90 years old and only 84 pounds, Ms. Z still had quite a presence. As her doctor, he admired her quiet strength. She had lived independently until she was hospitalized with shortness of breath.

In the hospital, her breathing improved, but not her strength. Working closely with her family, he came up with a plan to keep her out of a nursing home. But he was worn out dealing with all the ‘red tape’.

“Great, we have a plan to get you home,” he said, feeling frazzled as he left her hospital room. “Good luck—and *thanks*.”

In the hallway, he stopped and took a deep breath. It started to sink in how challenging it was going to be for her family to provide 24/7 care for Ms. Z. And also what a privilege it had been for him to care for her—to witness her family’s devotion to ease her suffering as her life neared its end.

He re-entered her room and saw Ms. Z sleeping, her kids looking at a stack of bills. He took a deep breath. He said:

**“I want you to know that I think you have a beautiful family.
Your efforts to help your mom are inspiring.
Thank you for letting me care for her.”**

As he walked toward the door, he felt a surge of emotion in his chest that rose to his head. Off-balance and with tears coming to his eyes, he stood and wondered what brought on these intense yet wonderful sensations.

Why had these two separate “thank you’s” to the same family provoked such different reactions?

He found an answer to that question when he learned more about research on gratitude. That research clearly suggests that gratitude carries important benefits to mental and physical health: It boosts our mood and satisfaction with life; there’s

even evidence linking it to improved cardiovascular health among people at risk for heart disease.

The research identifies effective expressions of gratitude. Effective expressions of gratitude make it more likely that we'll enjoy the positive benefits. Dr Hass came to believe these authentic experiences of gratitude can revitalize the work of health professionals. I think authentic experiences of gratitude can also revitalize **our** lives – those of us who are just 'ordinary people'.

- **What he does individually for an authentic experience of gratitude**
 - He **slows down** before each encounter, often with a deep breath, so that he will see the beauty in the person's struggles.
 - He thanks them for letting him be involved in their lives at this important time.
 - He anticipates a rush of positive emotion, which gives him strength and compassion to carry on this important work!

Couldn't we slow down before encounters and thank others in our lives like this?

As a younger doctor, he thought "thank you's" delivered at work were simply a forced, impersonal customer service tool. We have also said such automatic 'thank you's'.

After 10 years, Dr Hess realized that he needed to do more to support his patients emotionally during their time in hospital. He thought that reassuring language might comfort his elderly patients. So despite reservations, he started thanking his patients with the hope that they would feel comforted by the exchange.

He found that these thank you's didn't only support his patients—they gave **him** an immediate burst of energy and renewed passion for his work. **Both** his patients and he felt good after these short conversations.

Now he suggests saying an affirmation like a prayer before clinics and rounds. They go something like this:

"Let us take a moment to acknowledge the struggles and suffering amongst us and to acknowledge all the love and hard work we give each day to each other."

Why couldn't we do this before meetings at church and even get together with friends and family.

He suggests becoming a ‘gratitude leader’ by thanking and acknowledging others for their compassion and care. Could we become ‘gratitude leaders’? acknowledging those who have helped us, identifying their specific gifts?

The key for Dr Hess lies in how Robert Emmons, a leading researcher of gratitude, defines gratitude:

**as a recognition of the gifts that others give us,
a recognition of the source of those gifts, and an appreciation of those gifts.**

For us, a recognition of the source of the gifts always brings us to our Lord, who is love itself!

That experience can often lead grateful people to “pay it forward.” In a well-known study led by Emmons, people who kept a journal of things for which they were grateful enjoyed a sustained sense of well being in their lives—and became motivated to help others.

Our Lord is very interested in our gratitude.

Having healed ten, He saw something greater in the one Samaritan who realized what had been done for him and went back, to fall at his feet, and praise God. He was part of a 2nd miracle, the miracle of a human who grasps that he is loved, and accepts this gift. Such faith saves us. Such faith is a gift back to God, a gift so compelling that God would die for love of it. Amen

***Not so long ago I found a site on the Internet called 'gratefulness.org'. It is served by Brother David Steindl-Rast, a famous Benedictine Monk. It is an interactive website for Grateful Living. There are several thousand participants daily from more than 243 countries.

It is said that Brother David brought the word 'gratefulness' into worldwide circulation. He speaks of gratefulness as "our **full** appreciation of something altogether unearned, ...: life, existence, belonging. Literally, it is great-**full**-ness."

It takes an "aha" moment – what the educator Abraham Maslow called a 'peak experience' – to comprehend this great fullness which we have always within our grasp. Such peak experiences take different forms.

For some people, such awakening comes in a single flash and remains for a lifetime. Is that what happened to the leper in our Gospel this morning? For most of us, though, awakenings come as glimpses. A moment of exhilaration on a mountaintop or at worship, can affect us for months or years, even though its initial vividness gradually fades. To hold on to that vividness requires practice.

Practice takes many forms. It can be a matter of heart, of mind, of will. At best, the practice of gratefulness involves all three, interweaving our emotions, our thoughts, and our resolve.

One form of practice is simply remembering. During the course of a day, we can set up for ourselves reminders of the gift that life is. Flowers or favourite music can be reminders; pointing to beauty and love in each moment.

Remembrance can also be practiced by writing down at the end of the day, a few things we are thankful for, even on the 'bad' days, even on the very bad days. This practice helps us notice the great 'full' ness God showers on us. This can help us savour the good things in our lives, like sucking slowly on a hard candy.

Grief and joy are more like twin sisters than opposites. Both can be powerful teachers. Both contain deep feeling. And both point towards gratefulness: In grief we face life's flimsiness and what's precious to us; while joy awakens us to life's wonder even when we've discovered how precarious it is.

Why is it we charge through life so unaware of our million deliverances? Do we appreciate our rescues or healings even a tenth of the time? If we could count the fears, both small and large, that once hounded us, and then thank God for each

dreaded thing that never happened, we would be hugely grateful. How long do we pause relieved and grateful when we finally find the car keys we thought we'd lost, or when we arrive home safely after driving on dark roads at night?

We are faced with the same dilemma as the lepers. Can we stop in our tracks like the 10th leper and realize what we are receiving? Once we see the great fullness that is ours, the grace we enjoy daily, simply because of God's good pleasure...we will live differently; thankful for the next breath or the next day.

Dr Bernie Seigel, famous for his work with cancer patients says in his book 'Prescriptions for Living'.

**For me, a lovely day is any day I wake up...yes
a lovely day is any day we wake up.**

Daily can we be grateful that we are able to see and walk and laugh and eat? Daily can we be grateful for our loved ones, intentionally appreciating their presence? It seems the loss of them—or the threat of it—that shakes us into awareness of their value to us.

But when we **wake up** from our sleep walk, when we see the wonder of our existence, then we begin to live. It is then we know what it is like, with the tenth leper, to be **saved**. It is then that we take time to examine with care each gift given to us day by day.

People in the grips of obsessive passion don't necessarily need to give up what they love, but to spend more time cultivating other hobbies and relationships.

“At the heart of the discussion is empowering young children to begin to feel how positive qualities such as kindness and gratitude feel in their bodies, physically,” says Flook. “This is where a mindful approach comes in – the skills build on paying attention to the body and extend to offering kind attention to ourselves and the world around us.”

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_health_professionals_should_cultivate_gratitude?utm_source=Greater+Good+Science+Center&utm_campaign=76246365fc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_07_26&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5ae73e326e-76246365fc-51714195

How the Science of Well-Being Is Evolving

Researchers explore the complexity of well-being at the 5th World Congress on Positive Psychology.

The field of positive psychology was born when researchers noticed that psychology was awfully negative—focusing on illness and suffering but mute on the topic of how to thrive and flourish.

Two decades later, you could say that positive psychology is moving past this dichotomy of positive and negative, toward a more nuanced perspective on the good life. At least, that was one of the themes at the International Positive Psychology Association’s [5th World Congress](#), a four-day conference held earlier this month that brought together more than 1,300 researchers, practitioners, students, and journalists in Montreal, Canada.

Researchers shared the complexities and complications they were uncovering about the elements of well-being, from gratitude and mindfulness to passion and grit. Here are some of their insights.

“I have been in Sorrow’s kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and a sword in my hands.” To lick out all the pots of sorrow and still rejoice in rainbows: Could we hope for a more profound expression of gratefulness?

Applying the Science of Gratitude in Education

Learn practical strategies and exercises for fostering gratitude in schools.

October 28, 2017

Seattle, WA

Over the past decade, science has shown that the practice of gratitude can be transformational for students and the adults who work with them.

Gratitude & Well-Being at Work

A day dedicated to the science of building gratitude in the workplace

November 17, 2017

San Francisco's Ft. Mason Center

“Let us take a moment to acknowledge the struggles and suffering amongst us and to acknowledge all the love and hard work we give each day to each other.”