

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
October 08, 2017
Luke 17:11-19

Thanksgiving

*May the words given me bring us all to a deeper sense of
gratitude and right relation with our God.*

Can we be thankful for *everything* in our lives? This was the question my husband Jim posed to over 500 teenagers in chapel at the school he is chaplain at on Thursday morning.

Jim had tested the question out earlier in the week. His colleague had broken his wrist while mountain biking. Was he grateful for his broken wrist? Paul said, "Definitely not!" But then fell silent for a moment or two and continued, "No, I'm not grateful for my broken wrist but I *am* grateful for the exceptional care I received at the hospital..... and for the time in emergency room – I actually got an uninterrupted couple of hours alone with my wife!"

In today's Gospel reading, we hear of the 10 lepers who are healed by Jesus. As Jesus enters the village, these outcasts call out to him from a distance. Jesus notices them and cares. He responds by sending them to go to be blessed by the priests. And then an interesting thing happens. On the way one of the lepers "sees" that he has been healed – (we don't know *what* he noticed)– and he turns back to fall at Jesus' feet to thank him. We're told that the other nine were also healed, but none of them turn back. So what does that

mean? Did the other 9 not *notice* that they were healed? Or does it mean they don't attribute their healing to Jesus?

It reminds me of the story of the young woman who was late for a job interview and unable to find a parking spot. She prays to God to provide her a spot and promises all sorts of things, like, she'll return to church and call her parents more often if only God will make a parking spot appear. After her impassioned plea, she circles the block one more time and suddenly there's a parking spot – right in front of where her appointment is. "Never mind, God," she says, "I found one."

Healing is an interesting thing because it can arrive in ways we could never imagine. Our lives unfold in ways that if we don't stop and pay attention, we might not notice the hand of God. If we don't take time to notice and reflect, we might not know how creatively and unexpectedly our needs have been met. How we've been healed in ways we could never have imagined, how our pain has been transformed into real blessing. And so we let the story of our past remain unchanged. We don't acknowledge God and the healing we've received.

I used to think history was a static thing. That it existed outside of myself as a single story and read like a book whose ending never changes. But there are so many stories that show that it's never too late to change the ending of a story; it's never too late to say sorry, or to give thanks. And God's healing can enter our lives when we least expect it. We just need to be aware. We need to be able to see. And then we can be truly thankful. We can return to Jesus and give thanks where thanks are due.

A quick example of this is one of the moments on my journey to being a priest here with you today.

My family was worshiping every Sunday at a Roman Catholic church where I was baptized as an adult along with our two young sons. We loved that church and found friends there. Priests came and went. Some were great, some mediocre. It didn't matter. The liturgy carried the day. That was until one particular priest arrived. I started reading the bulletin during his sermons – something I've always been critical of others doing - because the message he gave was so negative. His sermons were mean-spirited. But that strategy didn't work for long. Soon my whole body was uncomfortable – I could hardly bear to be present. Jim found it intolerable as well so we stopped going. I was so angry and disappointed. I blamed this priest. It hurt to leave.

Time passed. We found another church. And became Anglicans. Fast forward 15 years, and here I am, an Anglican priest. What I thought was a disaster and a terrible experience became the impetus for a great journey and entry into a whole new world. God more than healed that experience. And one day when I was telling my tale of woe, it came to me how untrue that story now was. My eyes were opened and I felt the gratitude sweep through me. All the resentment and anger disappeared. I was healed. It took years for me to see this. Because I was attached to my story.

Like my husband's colleague, it took me seeing the bigger picture to be able to truly give thanks for all the ways I am challenged to move ahead in my life and all the ways I am truly cared for.

Are you able to think of an example from your own life where something very precious and wonderful has come from something you judged as terrible, bad or wrong?

We don't need to be grateful for everything that happens in our lives. But it sure makes life more wonderful to be able to see how God takes the difficult moments of our lives and composts them to create new opportunities for growth and life.

Difficult things certainly happen in life. And most of them are of our own creation – the careless things we do, the thoughtless ways we treat each other and Creation. It would certainly help if we were more aware and thoughtful about how we journey through life. But with everything, God can bring healing. This is God's nature. We're invited into the Divine flow – where everything is reconciled in God's self. We just can't seem to see clearly. We just don't think clearly.

Gratitude is *not* a manufactured emotion. Gratitude is not something we *should* feel or express. Gratitude automatically wells up when we let our stories and histories change. As the healing story from today's gospel points out, gratitude springs from "seeing." Jesus "sees" the lepers, and the one leper "sees" that he has been healed. Once we "see," or recognize, God's presence and action in our lives, gratitude flows *naturally*. We change direction and return to God and fall at God's feet, in awe.

How incredibly loved we are! Blessed Thanksgiving. *Amen.*