

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
October 9, 2016.
Luke 17:11-19

When I was a young, we lived in a neighbourhood full of children. We all came home from school for lunch everyday and every once and a while, if our mothers had to be out for an appointment or something, we would go to a neighbour's home for lunch. And likewise, sometimes kids would come to our home. I remember repeatedly the children from next door being sent over in the afternoon on such a day, to thank our mother for the lunch. The three of them would stand at the door and say in monotone unison, "Thank you for the lovely lunch, Mrs. Krayenhoff," and then turn and go.... duty done.

On one occasion, our family was having dinner when they arrived, and once they left, my parents took the opportunity to talk about saying thank you; how to mean it, and how to be specific about what you were appreciative of. It's a lesson that's stayed with me. When we are genuine and specific, it means we've noticed what has been generously extended to us and we express how our lives are made richer by the experience. Gratitude is not a platitude. It's part of the Divine Exchange.... it feeds, supports and enriches life because gratitude tunes our attention to the One who created everything and created all possibility – God. Gratitude carries us to that "spacious place" that the psalmist spoke about.

In our reading from Luke today, we hear the story of ten lepers who ask to be healed by Jesus. As they are walking to see the priest, as Jesus has directed them to do, one of them notices that he has, in fact, been healed. Does this mean the others don't even notice? Are they simply intent on doing their duty? We don't know. What we do know is that the one who looks down and sees that his sores have disappeared, turns back, finds Jesus, falls at his feet, thanks him and praises God.

Good formula for us today! To pay attention to how we are being healed, search out Jesus, humble ourselves, allow gratitude to flow out of us and then praise the Creator and Maker of all.

There's power in this formula – in the acknowledgment and gratitude of the healing, for Jesus says, “*Your faith* has made you well.” So the healing isn't complete until it is recognized and given thanks for. Wow, that's interesting!

This seems to suggest that with the 9 other lepers, or the vast majority, there *has been* healing but it hasn't been recognized - recognized in a way that if the healing truly sank in, the people would be running back to thank the Healer and give thanks to the Creator. And without this recognition and praise, it seems the person isn't fully restored. Faith is a crucial component. Faith allows us to see what is really going on. Faith gives us eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to respond.

Victor Frankl, the author of *Man's Search for Meaning* and the survivor of a Nazi concentration camp made the following statement that has been a guiding principle for me as an adult:

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." In other words, we all are affected by the world and people around us. But it is in our power to choose to either react or respond. Do we turn the other cheek? Or do we lash out? Do we walk through life half asleep, doing as others do – like the 9 walking to see the priest unaware of the miracle that has been manifested in their lives – or are we paying attention, alert to activity of God in our lives, and ready to respond?

This week, St. Mary's was the target of vandalism. Vandalism with a message. But a message that is difficult to respond to because we don't know the person and we don't know what they need.

Someone purposefully flooded this part of the sanctuary. Our response can be horror and indignation; natural first reactions. And then we can move on and find that spacious place between the stimulus and our response, and opening up our hearts to find a radically different response. One that moves beyond the drama of the event to a place of compassion. Can we not wonder what would motivate a person to do such a thing? Can we not imagine how much pain a person would have to be in to do such a thing? Can we not soften our hearts and find compassion for such a person?

As Christians, we are called to respond to life with an awareness of God's action in the world. It is easy to fall into judgment, disillusionment, despair. But who are we to know how God is moving in this situation? We need to keep our eyes and ears open, we need to check our hearts to see if they feel hard and closed or soft and open. We need to pray and we need to stay centred, acknowledging our own failings and ask for healing for ourselves and each other. And can we, in the midst of all the things that bring us down, give thanks for all that we have been given? Can we open our eyes to all the ways in which we are blessed? These kinds of situations are all opportunities for us to practice, as individuals and as a community, how to engage in responses that are firmly grounded in soft and forgiving and curious hearts.

I stand here looking at this church where just yesterday a beautiful young couple exchanged wedding vows; at this sanctuary where members of our parish have so lovingly created a sense of the harvest bounty and beauty. This is where I choose to focus my gaze.

I look out at the community in wonder - how we gather faithfully week after week; hungry for the word of the Lord, singing our hearts out and feasting together at the table. Where people care for each other in wonderful ways.

Our God is doing miraculous things. God sent us Jesus who has healed us. We just don't fully know or believe it yet! When we get an inkling of the miracle of our lives, perhaps we will run back and say something like the ancient poet who said,

“Days pass and the years vanish and we walk sightless among miracles. Fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing. Let there be moments when Presence, like lightning, illuminates the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see wherever we gaze and exclaim in wonder: “How filled with awe is this place and we did not know it!”

This is a happy Thanksgiving. We are a blessed people. Let us give thanks and praise to God saying as the psalmist today said, “Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; Sing the glory of his name. Give to him glorious praise.”

Amen.