

## **Message for Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2019**

**(18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)**

*(Luke 17.11-19, Jeremiah 29.1,4-7, Ps 66.1-11, 2 Timothy 2.8-15)*

Giving thanks - I wonder how good we are at doing that. The portion of Luke's Gospel that we have heard today is an ageless and eternal reminder to us to give thanks.

We could focus on a number of things in today's Gospel – the miracle of Jesus' healing, the distinction drawn between the lepers – drawn down ethnic lines, for we are told quite clearly that it was the 'foreigner' who returned.

But I think our focus really must be upon Jesus' message of giving praise and thanks to God. Of the ten people suffering leprosy, just one turned back to praise God and give thanks for his healing.

In biblical times lepers were considered unclean and not able to live in community with others. Anything or anyone they touched was considered unclean and even breathing the same air as the leper was believed to be dangerous.

If the priest pronounced that someone had leprosy they were looked upon as dead and cast out of society to dwell in a colony in the wilderness, living in caves or tents. They were commanded to wear certain clothes, keep themselves a specified distance from people, and were required to cry out 'unclean, unclean' if someone came too close. Leprosy was seen as a punishment from God. It was truly a desperate situation for anyone to find themselves in.

And so, we might wonder why it was that of the ten lepers in our story, only one returned to Jesus. It might have been that the other nine were so overcome by their healing that it simply slipped their minds – they forgot. It might have been that they didn't see the need.

We really don't know; but for a moment let us look at this story from the viewpoint of the 9 lepers who didn't return to give thanks. I think we can say that they did have faith in the healing power of God, found in Jesus.

After calling Jesus 'Master' and begging for his compassion on their plight, they trusted him completely. When he told them to go and show themselves to the priests, they rushed away, focused on fulfilling the necessary cleansing rites prescribed by Jewish law.

And we can probably imagine what happened next. Having been so cruelly excluded from community life, they would have run home to the family, friends and community they had left behind. And most likely, they would soon have settled back into their old lives.

They probably would have just wanted to forget that terrible, degrading, hopeless experience of being banished from their homes and loved ones because of their leprosy. To want to forget or deny painful or difficult events, is after all, a very human reaction when tough stuff happens in our lives.

For these 9 lepers the whole experience would have been so profoundly dehumanising that they simply wanted to move beyond it. Because of this desire to disown their past sorrows and create new memories, they had missed the sheer grace of God that brought wholeness and healing. They had missed the real meaning of what had just happened to them.

But the Samaritan, the one who returned, for whom family and community probably would have meant just as much; interrupted his journey. For him it wasn't just physical healing that had occurred. Some new understanding of God's grace had entered his life and he turned. He returned to Jesus and gave thanks and praised God.

Luke uses the Greek word 'eucharisto' here and just as we understand that eucharist means 'to give thanks', those listening to Luke's Gospel all those years ago, would have understood only too well the significance of this word.

The Samaritan's life had become infused with gratitude - a song of praise and thanksgiving. He understood the sheer grace and merciful love in his healing and his joy and gratitude could not be contained. The pain and degradation that he had experienced during his time of suffering as a leper had been transformed by compassion and love; by the beauty of this deed of God in Jesus.

Writer and priest, John O'Donohue describes beauty as 'a homecoming to the human spirit'. It is an awesome phrase and I am sure for each of us, time spent contemplating that simple phrase holds the promise of rich reflection. If we think of God as the source of all beauty, then all creation and all that happens within creation, falls within the realms of beauty.

We know that life isn't always beautiful, but beautiful things can happen even in the ugliest or most trying of circumstances. Joyce Rupp, in her guide to spiritual growth, *The Cup of our Life*, reflects that 'some of our

greatest blessings have been difficult situations, uncomfortable ones we may want to throw out of our lives as quickly as possible. Sometimes our greatest pain holds a gift for us that is hidden for a long, long time for the blessing is disguised amid the turmoil, confusion, heartache and struggle'.

We all have times when we might react as the 9 lepers did; times when our lives are thrown into turmoil; times when we just want to move on and forget.

However, life is a gift; our health is a gift, the friendship and love of family and others is a precious gift – All these things are to be treasured and safeguarded with gratitude.

When we remember to turn back; when we remember to reflect on the many gifts and graces we receive, we are wrapped in God's gracious love; we are cradled and comforted and in time, able to move forward with deep thankfulness.

Perhaps this is the underlying message of the prophet Jeremiah to the Israelites who found themselves exiled in Babylon. We heard today that he urged them to settle in Babylon and to pray to God for that community. They were to make it their own. In praying for the welfare of Babylon and remembering to give thanks to God for that community and the many gifts contained therein, their own welfare is assured.

Giving thanks marks the ordinary as extraordinary. Giving thanks helps us to remember who and whose we are, beloved and held by God. And just as importantly, giving thanks helps us to remember who we are to each other.

Thanks, offered as sincere appreciation, is 'beauty'. As we go about our living this week, may we each bear witness to the many colours of beauty that infuse our relationships with God, with loved ones, with all.

I pray that as we come to terms with the challenges and changes that we meet each day, we are each given strength to take the next step, comfort when it is needed, guidance for those challenges, discernment for decision making and may we be ever mindful of the many and varied ways God is present in all circumstances of our lives. And for all this, may we always remember to turn back in gratitude to give praise and thanks to God.

The Lord be with you.

(Acknowledgements: R. Alan Culpepper, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Vol IX*, Joyce Rupp *The Cup of Our Life*, John O'Donohue, Kym Harris *Pray as you Can*, Rev'd D Trail)

### **Luke 17:11-19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

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

### **Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

**29** These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

<sup>4</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

### **Psalms 66**

<sup>1</sup> Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

<sup>2</sup>     sing the glory of his name;  
      give to him glorious praise.

<sup>3</sup> Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!  
      Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

<sup>4</sup> All the earth worships you;  
      they sing praises to you,  
      sing praises to your name." *Selah*

<sup>5</sup> Come and see what God has done:  
      he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

<sup>6</sup> He turned the sea into dry land;  
      they passed through the river on foot.

There we rejoiced in him,  
<sup>7</sup>     who rules by his might forever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—  
      let the rebellious not exalt themselves. *Selah*

<sup>8</sup> Bless our God, O peoples,  
      let the sound of his praise be heard,

<sup>9</sup> who has kept us among the living,  
      and has not let our feet slip.

<sup>10</sup> For you, O God, have tested us;  
      you have tried us as silver is tried.

<sup>11</sup> You brought us into the net;  
      you laid burdens on our backs;

### **2 Timothy 2:8-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. <sup>14</sup> Remind them of this, and warn them before God<sup>[a]</sup> that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. <sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.