

## Giving Thanks or, Who Was Really Healed?

Luke 17:11-19

SSUMC UMC October 9, 2011

One thing I often heard as pastor are the excuses people give for not reading the Bible. I understand every one of them, why, I've used them too. The Bible, besides, or perhaps because it is God's word is an amazing book to read. You know those children's books that invite you to make choices and then you follow that choice to another and another and there are multiple story lines and endings? Well, the Bible isn't like that. What the Bible does, is give us food for thought and invite us into the story to consider our reaction and response. The Bible loves to leave us hanging in its stories.

Today's text is a case in point. We ask, is Jesus focusing our attention on the one healed leper who comes back to give thanks or the other nine? What happened to the other nine anyway? Where did they go? Let's see if we can figure that out.

I'm going to need some help in telling this story. Part of the experience this morning is from a favorite book, *Prostitute in the Family Tree*.

➤ Recruit 3-4 "judges"

➤ Recruit 7 "lepers"

(Applause)

### **Introduction:**

Now we know what happened to one of the leper's, he's the one that came back and thanked Jesus. He was a Samaritan. The story takes place in this area between Samaria and Galilee where Jesus

lived. Imagine you're looking north just as you would on a map of the Middle East. To your left where the classrooms are would be the Mediterranean Sea. Up here in the front few rows on the left is Galilee; y'all are Jesus' family and friends. The middle rows are Samaria; no one likes you and you don't like anyone who doesn't live in Samaria. The Samaritans are hated for intermixing with other people and they worship God on some mountain instead of in Jerusalem. The rest of the rows in back are Jerusalem. You are the pious followers of Judaism. Those people up there in Galilee are just a bunch of poor hicks; country bumpkins that you just don't take seriously. Oh, the rest of you over here on this side of the room...you're the Gentiles on the east side of the Jordan River. You'll believe anything. You've embraced all religions and when the Romans came in, while you don't like their occupation, you like their adoption of all of your gods and worshiping the emperor? Well, that just added another god to your arsenal of religious resources so you said, "Oh, what the heck, we'll worship him too...at least he's alive right now."

Ok, so that's the setting and the place where this happens. Chances are the other nine lepers are this mix of Samaritans and Jews; outcasts from their own communities because of some visible skin disease. These people look awful and no one wants to be around them, no one will talk to them, and they aren't supposed to talk to anyone. But they did, they broke the taboo by calling out to Jesus, maybe, just maybe the stories they had heard were true and he could heal them. They heard he had some kind of

ability to heal people of all sorts of diseases so maybe he could heal them too.

### **The Game (applause for volunteers)**

We've invited all nine of the other lepers to come and be a part of the *Sunday Morning Talk Show* but only seven could be here. Please say hello to the lepers (helper holds up "Hello Lepers" sign). You're here today is to tell us why you didn't go back to see Jesus like the tenth. Of the nine invitations, two lepers couldn't be with us. One of our invitations was returned marked "moved left no forwarding address" and we received a note from Micah who wrote; "Thank you for the invitation but I cannot come. After my healing, I met a really nice Galilean woman and married her. I never bothered to tell her I was a leper and it is a little late to tell her now. Say hi to the other lepers for me." (hold up "hello Lepers" sign). So we have 7 lepers to talk to today. (Hello Lepers sign).

These other folks over here have volunteered to be our judges (Hello Judges). They are going to help us decide which of the leper's has the best excuse for not coming back to see Jesus. (Hello Judges). They each have a set of numbers and after each leper, they will make their decision and hold up a card with their vote. (Applause) Let's get right to our interviews now. (interview all 7 and judges)

After thanking each one and judges (Applause) excuse them to return to their seats.

One other time I taught this lesson I heard an excuse that was a perfect ten. Here is that excuse.

I did not thank Jesus right away because I followed what he told us to do: to go show ourselves to the priests. After I had done that, I went back to find Jesus to thank him; but he moved around a lot and had left each place I looked for him. I persisted but never found him; but I did find Peter. I said, "Peter, I am looking for Jesus. Where is Jesus?" And Peter answered, "I don't know any Jesus."

The Miracles of Jesus are not about perfection, they often have an element of humor in them and the writers of the gospels have left us to wonder what happened and where the recipients of these miracles went after the healing. Often the recipient of the miracle is someone who doesn't believe in Jesus or is a skeptic. Rarely is the elite ruling group a subject of a miracle. There are really two stories contained in the larger narrative.

The first story is the story of the Samaritan who comes back. The account in verse 15, relates that when he saw he was healed, he turned back and went to Jesus. He didn't follow instructions. He didn't go directly to the priest. He, perhaps he alone, recognized the miracle for what it was; the direct hand of God extending grace and mercy. As a leper, he represents the despised of Jerusalem, yet he is the one that returns to give thanks to Jesus. We are left to assume that the others, perhaps all Jews, went on their way to the priests and lived happily ever after. But that's not what the story tells us. The second half of the story is the question posed to the disciples, "was

none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

So we ask questions, that’s what Luke wants us to do. We ask questions about the nine, and about ourselves. Do we even see the miracle? Where do we think it came from? Why did I receive it? Do I obey and go to the priest (do I obey and be loyal to the church and service to God)? Do I even need to give thanks? At least one person, the Samaritan, recognized the miracle and fell at Jesus’ feet.

After telling this miracle story, Luke goes right on with a discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees about the kingdom of God. He says, “...the kingdom is not coming with things that can be observed” but that it is “among you.” Luke was explaining that with the healing, God’s kingdom is present. Do you need to be healed? (discuss healing and salvation – pray)

The nine remind us of Peter, and we thank God for Peter; he makes it possible for each of us to be disciples.