

“Thank You”  
November 22, 2020  
Thanksgiving Sunday

*(All the credit for this sermon goes to  
Nadia Bolz-Weber and John Buchanan  
and my Church and dear friends.)*

Luke 17:11–19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

“And as they went, they were made clean”

Then 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. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?”

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

Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Given that the gospel reading is about the grateful healed leper, (and Thanksgiving is this week) I began to think about what a terrible thank-you-note writer I am.

My mother, on the other hand, tried to install in our brains that hand-written thank-you-notes are the epitome of our existence.

I have known her to send thank you notes to those who have sent her thank you notes.

After my wedding, she called every day to see if I had written thank you notes to all those who gave me a gift and for coming to the wedding.

And then of course like every other kid who receives a \$5 bill in their birthday card, I was expected to send a thank you note to Grandma.

But it never felt like a natural – or outpouring of my gratitude. It felt like an obligation. An obligation I sometimes would gladly give \$10 to get out of.

I heard an interview not long ago with a front-line medical care person who noted when the pandemic started there was such support and gratitude. But she said now people are only angry because we are not doing more. A medical doctor said – If you want to be thankful for us then wear a mask.

And our text for today has Jesus healing ten lepers, and only one returned to give thanks to Jesus and praise to God.

And as I thought about the Samaritan Leper who was healed and turned back to Jesus, fell before him praising God, I realized that perhaps I do not praise God very much.

I realized in this pandemic, not being able to celebrate the holidays, hearing about too many who are sick or who died and not been able to have a funeral or wedding – how much easier it is to lament and complain to God and how much trickier it feels to praise God. It seems easier to long for what I want, or to resent what I have lost -than it is for me to be thankful for what I have.

First let me be clear, what praise is not. Praise isn't stroking God's ego or telling God how awesome God is – as though God has low self-esteem and created us for just this. Thankfulness is not an obligation like the thank-you note to Grandmother.

Here are some quotes that define praise and thank you:

*(Walter Brueggemann)* "Praise is the duty and delight, the ultimate vocation of the human community."

*(Karl Barth)* "What else can we say to what God gives us but stammer praise of this gift and giver?"

*(C. S. Lewis)*, noticing that grateful people are happy people, said: "Praise is inner health made audible."

*(John Updike)* "Ancient religion and science agree: we are here to give praise . . . to pay attention."

So rather than explain about praise anymore, I thought that what I really needed this week on a spiritual level was to actually praise God. But you are totally free to listen in and add your own.

*<sup>11</sup>On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.*

That you God, are one who comes to us in the regions between – the uncategorizable spaces that we often

Fail to notice or we fear altogether. Thank you.

Thank you for those who use science to make vaccines, for those who put out forest fires. And for saving cats who fall in sewer holes. Thank you for the space between my wakefulness and sleep where what I foolishly call intuition kicks in. Thank you for the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Thank you for being in the spaces we try to pretend are not there.

*<sup>12</sup>As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup>they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”*

For your Spirit that is a live and dwells within us and all around. Thank you for giving us a glimpse of who you are in how Jesus healed and forgives us.

For your earthy care to all us broken winged birds - I give you thanks

*<sup>14</sup>When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”*

That you see me O God, I give you thanks.

Thank you for seeing what I try to hide.

Thank you for seeing my hurt and my fear. Thank you for seeing my heart and my humor.

Thank you for seeing that I am stronger than I think and that I am also not nearly as strong as I think.

Thank you for seeing this broken-weary world in all its beauty – and most especially thank you for seeing all of these things and then responding in nothing but completely crazy love.

Thank you for how you have sent people to show themselves to me and how in doing so – you have shown yourself to me.

Knowing that without the stories, gifts and scars of people who talk with me those I know and do not - I see you.

*"And as they went, they were made clean"*

That healing happens in all kinds of community O God, I praise you. Thank you for bringing people together to be made whole again even in cyberspace.

For the ways we harm each other instead - forgive us.

*<sup>15</sup>Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.*

Praise you God for the ones who turn back.

Thank you for all the people in my life who speak your name, who bravely point to you as the source and ground of all goodness,

who dare to recognize you as God and who remind me that you are real and you are actively making whole - me and them and all of creation.

*<sup>16</sup>He prostrated himself at Jesus' 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?"*

Thank you for revealing yourself in the foreigner. The ones who are called outsiders. I think. It's one of the hardest parts to follow Jesus.

But thank you for loving me enough to let me stay comfortable – for far too long.

Thank you for interrupting my pride and refusing to leave me as is. It's painful but in your faithfulness, you lead me through death to surprising life.

*<sup>19</sup>Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."*

For all the things that have been healed and that we have failed to even notice - we give you thanks today. Thank you for our communities – in person and on zoom.

Thank you for the chaos of children.

Thank you for those bushes outside this church that suddenly became a fountain of unbelievable colors –

all at once as though it was showering the world with some desperately needed grace.

Thank you for friends who text back. Thank you for decaf americano with cold cream and caramel. Thank you for a friend who reminded me recently - that when in doubt just say “Thy Will be Done” because I totally had forgotten about that part.

Thank you for clean water and safe roads and electricity and garbage pick-up. Thank you for the babies.

Thank you for never leaving us. Thank you for that dinner I got to share with my husband this week.

Thank you for all the people who manage to make me laugh.

Thank you for a congregation who doesn't mind when I make sermon blunders or talk too fast.

Thank you for those who send good well and thinking-of-you-cards, an occasional phone call or email. Thank you for my dog Zack who lies at the foot my bed keeping me warm.

Thank you for our first responders, medical staff, and social workers, police officers, fire workers, my children – my Dad (who I miss) , Kaden and Hunter, Chuck, chaplains, teachers, all those who make this world more livable.

And thank you for my mother for telling me that saying thank you is the epitome of our existence.

The hymn writer Martin Rinkart, in the seventeenth century, in the middle of a dark time of religious war and suffering and death, wrote

Now thank we all our God  
who wondrous things hath done;  
who from our mother's arms,  
hath blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love,  
and still is ours today.

And so whatever your particular circumstance this morning – worried about your health, your job, your savings account, your retirement, your relationships . . . Whatever your circumstance – having received a great joy, the birth of a child, an expression of love, a successful surgery, a surprising

grace or having suffered a great loss, the death of a dear one, a parent, a spouse, a friend, a beloved colleague . . .

You belong to God. So do give thanks. Say grace.

The Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever.

Amen.

What happens when you say thank you?

Could our neglecting to say thank you to others – be connected with not being able to receive a thank you?

I would love to hear your responses – send a Facebook message.