

Please pray with me. May the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, and may you add a blessing to the hearing and understanding of this message today. Amen.

As I've studied this gospel lesson this week,
it has come to me to be a good illustration not only of gratitude,
but how to live a life of faith.

As Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem,
10 lepers see him while he's entering a village.
As religious law and tradition had it,
they kept their distance even as they beg for his intervention.
"Jesus, Master/Lord, have mercy,"
they cry to him from a distance.
In reply, Jesus sends them to Jerusalem to see the priests.

The lepers do as Jesus tells them.
They don't wait to be healed and then
set off to see the priests who have the final say on
their return to normal life. No, they go immediately.

They go because Jesus tells them to go to the priests.
They trust that there will be a change in their circumstances by
the time they arrive in Jerusalem to see the priests.
They set out believing that God in Jesus would have mercy on them,
would change their lives,
would bring them healing.

This is a great illustration of faithful living.

The lepers have a visible sign of disease.
They are considered unclean.
They have a skin condition that makes them unpleasant to be around.
This gospel shows Jesus showering grace on the diseased and sinful.
We are not so unlike the lepers.
Though we might not have a skin condition,
we have things about us that make us unpleasant to be around.

Negative thinking.

Or criticizing and rarely building up our family.

Or, perhaps pride or insecurity moves us to boast or brag.

Maybe instead of directly addressing a hurt or a complaint with someone, we grumble to another or nurse resentment or react passive aggressively.

Much of the time we put on a brave front, and our sin,

our unkind and ungracious thoughts and actions don't show.

Except we see the effects in this world.

And, like the lepers,

we cry out to Jesus for healing,

for indeed it is only God's grace, God's mercy,

God's undeserved love that will save us.

In the case of the lepers,

they have been separated from their community and from God.

They knew that they couldn't heal themselves.

They cry out to Jesus, begging for mercy.

This is part of our life of faith – recognizing our place in God's creation.

Recognizing that we can't save ourselves.

This leads them to do what Jesus tells them to do.

Maybe there was debate among them about whether to do it.

Maybe some needed to be convinced,

but what the author of our sacred scripture sets before us is:

when Jesus tells you to do something:

do it.

They stepped out in faith,

trusting that something good would come from their journey,

trusting that God was leading the way.

Maybe you've moved somewhere without a job,

you stepped out in faith that there will be some way

for you to at least get your basic needs met and

hopefully find a vocation that is fulfilling to you.

Perhaps you have made a career change because you felt God calling you to use more fully the gifts you so passionately love to share with others, even if it means economic uncertainty.

Perhaps you have had to let one of your children, a parent or sibling stand on their own without your help all the while fighting the urge to step in and rescue them.

A life of faith means stepping out and taking risks, not always knowing how things will turn out, but trusting God will make it ok.

Then, when one of the lepers saw that he'd been healed, he turned back, praised God and fell down and worshipped Jesus. This leper then receives not only the gift of healing, but the gift of wellness – wholeness – the gift of being set right with God – he was saved.

This leper, who was a Samaritan, praised God with a loud voice and he threw himself at Jesus' feet and he thanked him profusely. It shows a passion and heart of gratitude, thankfulness and joy. When Martin Luther was asked to describe the true nature of worship, he answered, "the tenth leper turning back."

In Jesus' day, the Samaritans were Gentiles to the Jewish community. They were generally thought to represent corrupted religious practice. They were ethnically and historically aligned with the Jewish people, but they were considered least in the kingdom of God and not true practitioners of the Jewish faith.

In this instance Jesus not only healed a Samaritan

showing that God's grace knows no boundaries,
but this Samaritan is the one -the only one –
that comes back to Jesus and
whole-heartedly praises him for the free gift of healing that
he has received –
a gift that he did nothing to earn.

This story is an inspiration and encouragement for us to
join with this outsider who was healed
and to praise God with a loud voice and
throw ourselves at Jesus' feet.
We are invited to join the throngs of others
covered in God's grace and mercy in
praise and thanks to God.

We are invited to return every Sunday to Jesus
with thanksgiving and praise.
Invited, not guilted into it,
or afraid that we'll go to hell if we don't,
but inspired to give God thanks for what Jesus has done for us.

Our gospel reading began with Luke reminding us that
Jesus is "on the way" to Jerusalem.
He is faithful to God's will in his life.
Jesus' faith will set us right with God.
Jesus is on his way to death and resurrection for us,
for this sick and sinful,
broken and hurting world.
It's the greatest healing event that God will give to the world,
so that we, too, return to God.
So that we, too,
come together every week,
to raise our hands and our voices in praise.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.