

October 10, 2010

**The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**

Luke 17:11-19

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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Growing up I had a really fine teacher, Mrs. Shachtel. She taught me in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade and she was an excellent teacher. She pushed me when I needed pushing, corrected me when I needed to be corrected. If she caught me lying, she dealt with me fairly. When I was upset, she would cut me a break. She pushed me to succeed in all academic subjects. When I did poorly, she admonished me. When I succeeded, she heaped praise on me. I have many memories of her. She has been my favorite teacher.

I never thanked her. All these years later I still remember her, and I look back with deep gratitude for her. But, I never thanked her. When I finally got around to trying, I was never able to locate her and say thank you. I am sure her life is unchanged as a result of my unexpressed gratitude. But, for me, there is a sense of emptiness. There is something of a void, because I never said "Thank you. You helped me become what I am, and I am grateful for your presence in my life." Human beings are complex beings. But, we all have a need to say thank you. Gratitude is part of our make-up. When we do not practice gratitude, we are not whole.

In the Gospel today we have 10 lepers who see Jesus and ask for help. They ask to be cleaned. Keep in mind that leprosy put the victims on the outside. The victim was unclean, cast out and not part of any community, with the exception of other cast out lepers. Jesus responds to their request, no questions asked, saying "go show yourselves to the priests." In other words, Jesus is acknowledging they are now clean, healed, and to join their communities again.

We know what happens then. One of them turns around and throws himself at the feet of Jesus and thanks Jesus. That man was a Samaritan. If a person with leprosy was an outsider, then a Samaritan with leprosy was an outsider twice over. This outsider is the one who stops, turns around and says thank you. It is at that point Jesus says "rise and go, your faith has made you well." Jesus distinguishes between physical healing and wellness.

All ten were healed. We do not know about the other nine. They were physically healed, yes. But, they went right on to their communities. Surely, they heard of Jesus beforehand and knew the reputation of Jesus. Surely they knew Jesus cured their ailments. Therefore, they recognized his work as one who was at least a prophet of God. They recognized God's work in Jesus but never stopped. They went on about their business of being restored in their communities. It is the Samaritan who expresses gratitude who is made well.

Throughout the Gospel, there is a connection between faith and healing. Someone is sick, goes to Jesus out of faith in hopes he or she can be healed. Jesus in his compassion heals. The healing is a response to faith. Unfortunately, this leads many to view Jesus as merely a healer and many miss his message. This is a persistent problem even today, where the idea is that if you only have enough faith, you will be physically healed. But Jesus does not come to us as simply a physical healer. Jesus comes to reconcile the world to God, to restore our relationship to God. It is in that restoration we find real healing, and are made well. So when the Samaritan returns to say thank you, to give praise, to acknowledge God's presence and work in the world through Jesus Christ, it is in that moment where he is made well, in a deeper sense than mere physical healing.

Gratitude is part of our being, part of how God made us. It is vital not only for relationships with each other but in our relationship with God. We have been given much in our lives. This is easy to forget in the hectic nature of our existence. We stress out about mortgages, rent payments, our careers, our pay scales, car payments, debt, political issues, environmental messes; it is easy to lose focus, to forget the goodness that is everywhere. It is easy to forget to say thank you and rush to the next moments in our lives. But we were not built that way. We were not made to be harried and rushed from moment to moment in our lives and forget the goodness in our loved ones, forget the goodness in creation or the goodness in God our creator. Rather, we were built to reflect God in the world, to reflect God's goodness and to have faith. Part of that faith is to live in gratitude.

Practicing gratitude takes pressure off ourselves, we acknowledge we can not accomplish much alone. We also say thank you to God, for putting those people in our lives who care, for guiding us in times of trouble, for endowing us with great gifts of creativity and motivation. We thank God for easing our burdens. We remember all the gifts we have been given, regardless of our merit. We thank God for giving us a beautiful world. We thank God for recreating the world through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and allowing us to participate in that recreation.

If this all sounds similar to the themes found in our liturgy on each Sunday, that is because when we worship, we are practicing gratitude. That is why Sundays in church are so important. Each time we gather here, we put down all the hassles of our lives and focus on what really matters. We gather around the table not merely to get a reward for our presence, but to give God our thanks and praise for the gifts in our lives.

Yet, even if we are not here to get something out of our participation, we do. We are changed. As individuals and as a congregation we see the world differently. In light of all our blessings, perhaps stewardship looks less like fundraising and more like glad gratitude from joyful givers. Or the mission of the church looks less like obligation and more like the work of grateful hands and hearts. Perhaps

the act of forgiveness becomes less difficult, or fighting for justice less tiresome. Perhaps relationships are renewed and we actually say thank you, to those who helped us along the way. Our practice of gratitude on Sunday is a source of energy and renewal for all.

Sunday worship is a wonderful thing. It is not God who needs us to worship with praise and thanksgiving. It is we who need it. It is we who need the Great Thanksgiving. When we practice gratitude here, name our blessings and give thanks, we find healing. There is healing within us, between ourselves and others, and a connection to God that brings about our wellness, regardless of our physical state. The Lord our God continues to give us much. Give thanks, brothers and sisters. Give thanks to the Lord our God and go into God's courts with joy.