



Living a Life of “Thank You” – Touchpoint for October 5, 2022

Luke 17:11-19 (NRSVA) Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers ¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.

¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?” ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“The former leper knelt at Jesus’ feet and thanked him... Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’”

“Thank you” is all he said. And Jesus replied, “Your faith has made you well.”

I don’t get it. There has been no mention of faith up to this point in the story. Not, at least, in the way I was taught the word ‘faith’ means. I was always taught that faith means ‘belief.’ I mean, when we have the confession of faith in our traditional liturgy on Sunday mornings, we say, “I believe.”

Or I was taught to think about faith as ‘trust.’ If you put your faith in something you trust in it. But there is no mention of belief or trust in this former leper coming back to Jesus. He simply comes back to say, “Thank you.”

And as I read this passage over and over again, something hit me. Kind of like a 2x4 right between the eyes.

What if faith isn’t belief or trust, what if faith is simply saying, “Thank you”? And by that, I don’t mean just saying it, but living it. What if faith is simply living a life of thanksgiving?

Now my first reaction to that is, “C’mon Jesus, that’s too easy.” Of course, until I started to think about it.

Because to live a life of thanksgiving means I have to acknowledge a ‘giver’ ... a ‘gifter.’ To live a life of thanksgiving means to acknowledge that I am not the beginning and end of existence. To live a life of thanksgiving means to acknowledge that the idea that I have possessions is an illusion. To be thankful for everything means that everything is a gift.

And so I began to run with this idea. Could it be that faith means saying, “Thank you”?

Would it fit to substitute ‘thank you’ in bible passages that say the word ‘faith’? “**Thank you** comes from what is heard.” Yeah, that works. “*The just shall live by **thankfulness**.*” That fits as well. “Your **‘thank you’** has made you well.” Hmmm, come to think of it, my selfishness or ingratitude have never made me well. And life does seem a lot healthier when I recognize all that I have been given.

Let's try some more, shall we?

*“Now **‘thankfulness’** is the assurance of all things hoped for.”* Let that one sink in.

*“For by grace you have been saved through **thanksgiving**. And this is not your own doing, it is a gift of God, not a result of works.”*

Now that fits perfectly. Because thankfulness is not a work. It is only the result of a gift. The only reason you and I say “Thank you” is because we have been given something... or had something done for us.

If I would stand up and say, “Look at me, I’m thankful,” it would seem a little odd. You might ask, “Thankful for what?” And if I replied, “It doesn’t matter, what matters is I decided to be thankful!”

Uhhh, no. I don’t think so.

And think about what a difference it would make in our confession of faith on Sunday mornings, when instead of saying, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...”

... What if we said:

“Thank you, God the Father. Thank you for creating heaven and earth.

“Thank you, Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. Thank you for being born of Mary. Thank you for suffering under Pontius Pilate. Thank you for being crucified and undergoing death. Thank you for being raised from the dead. Thank you for being the one who will judge us... a judge who already forgave us from the cross, and in the night in which you were betrayed. Thank you for being the one who forgives 7 x 70... for that kind of judge is our only hope.

“Thank you, Holy Spirit. Thank you for the communion of saints. Thank you for the forgiveness of sin. Thank you for the resurrection of the dead and thank you for life everlasting.”

Now that’s more than a confession of belief. That’s a confession of dependence, of gratitude.

The whole focus shifts away from me and what I believe, and onto the giver – the gifter – of all.

Which is what the one former leper did. He wasn’t focused on his own purity, but the one who had declared him pure, made him pure.

This isn’t that much different from last week’s passage where the disciples ask Jesus to “Increase our faith.” And Jesus basically replies, **“Don’t make your faith the object of your faith.”**

In this one healed leper, a foreigner for that matter, we see someone who hasn’t made his own purity the object of his faith.

I wish I could say the same about myself. How often have I made my own purity, my own righteousness, my own holiness the object of my faith... rather than the one who has declared me pure, declared me righteous, declared me holy?

How much time have I spent reading the bible and leading bible studies with the goal of increasing my or others' understanding, rather than bringing myself or them to a greater sense of thankfulness?

Because, if your belief system doesn't make you thankful, what good is it? Jesus, it seems, is more interested in us being thankful than believing rightly. Is that why it was a Samaritan who came back? The one with the 'wrong' belief system?!

Arguing about doctrine and theology and beliefs seems absurd in the face of faith being understood as being 'thankful.'

I think the next time I meet a Christian fundamentalist who wants to argue theology, I think I will just ask, "And how does all of this make you thankful?" Because, if your belief system doesn't make you thankful, what good is it?

When faith becomes thanksgiving, the whole focus gets changed. It's a Copernican revolution. I am no longer the center.

When I say, "I believe," or "I accept," the focus is on me.

When I say, "Thank You," the focus is on the other... the Mystery... the giver and gifter of all.

And think what this means for inter-faith conversation. The question isn't, "Tell me what you believe?" But, "Tell me how you say 'Thank you.'"

How do you say 'thank you' to the Mystery?

I say 'thank you' through Christian stories and ritual. I'm a part of the Christian "Thank you."

Tell me about your "Thank you" tradition.

After all, is there only one right way to say, "Thank you"? Is there only one right way to live a life of "Thankfulness"?

Are there only certain situations in which one should say, "Thank you"?

Only when life is going well?

What about those in recovery who are thankful for what their addiction has taught them? What about those who have been through serious illness who are thankful for the life they now live? What about those like my sister who has said, "I don't need to be healed from my MS, because my MS has healed me."

Remember, it was in the night in which he was betrayed that Jesus took bread, and gave FAITH, oops, I mean gave Thanks... but come to think of it he also gave faith. He gave his faith, his thankfulness, to his disciples, along with his body and blood.

And when you read the story of his followers in the Book of Acts, that is pretty much all they are doing. Living a life of thanksgiving. Sharing all and everything they have.

Why, Paul even gives thanks for his imprisonments!

We call this meal the “Eucharist.” The word literally means, “Giving thanks.”

But couldn't it also mean “Giving faith”? Because isn't that what we're given in his body and blood? His life of faithfulness, even in his betrayal and denial.

Call me crazy... 66 years of struggling with what it means to have faith? How to increase my faith? How to share my faith? You know, what does it all mean?!

And Jesus simply responds, *“Why don't you start and end by saying, “Thank you.”*

It all seems too easy, which is probably what makes it so hard.

Because to live a life of thanksgiving means I have to acknowledge a ‘giver’ ... a ‘gifter.’ To live a life of thanksgiving means to acknowledge that I am not the beginning and end of existence. To live a life of thanksgiving means to acknowledge that the idea that I have possessions is an illusion.

To be thankful for everything means that everything is a gift. And if it is even possible to increase my faith, my thankfulness, then the only way to do so is to increase my awareness of the giver and giftedness of life... to look outside myself... for there is no place for a navel-gazing faith when faith is seen as thankfulness.

We say “Thank you” to God. And God replies back, *“You're welcome. Now go on, get out of here. Your ‘thankfulness’ is your healing, your ‘thankfulness’ will make you whole.”*

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.
Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.