

Eighteenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "The Grateful Samaritan"
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; Luke 17:11-19
October 11-12, 2025
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

If someone takes a gift for granted, because they feel they **deserve** it, after all, what do we call that attitude? ***** Entitlement!

In today's Gospel we see two qualities that are the **opposite** of entitlement: deep **humility** and overwhelming **gratitude**.

Who's humble in the story?

Not just Leper #10, but all of them, are **humble**. Why do I say that? Because of what they cry out: "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*" (Luke 17:13). They're not saying, "Hey, dude, we're next in line for healing," as if they're the boss of Jesus. They're begging him to have mercy – to see and meet their need, unworthy as they are. It's like the Roman centurion who tells Jesus, "I am not worthy that You should enter my house, but only say the word and my servant will be healed." (Matthew 8:8) "You have no reason to help me, **except** that You are all-merciful and all-powerful."

The lepers are also **humble** in that they keep their distance from Jesus. They're far enough away that they have to shout. Why? People realized that at least some skin diseases are contagious. (Leprosy was a big umbrella, and covered problems all the way from Hansen's Disease which can make skin die and limbs to fall off, to psoriasis.) The Law of Moses in Leviticus has 2 full chapters about what to do if you have a skin disease **and** how to treat someone who has one. As the rules evolved, it was common practice that if the wind was blowing at a full-blown leper's back he should stand at least 50 yards away from anyone else! (Yup, half a football field.) The poor afflicted people were also told they

should tear their clothes, be sure their hair was disheveled, and shout “Unclean, unclean!” just to be sure no healthy person inadvertently got too close, unaware of the proximity of illness. They were exiled from family, friends, work, community. No way to live. No wonder they begged Jesus to have mercy!

What’s Jesus’ response? “Stay the heck away from Me!”?? No. He **does** tell them to leave, though. *“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”* (Lk. 17:14c) Why?

In order for a leper to reenter community, he or she had to show him or herself to a priest, who hopefully would find that the leper had become clean, and who would receive a thank offering to God for the healing. Do you see the cycle? Prayer, answer to prayer, gratitude, and an act of thanksgiving. A sense of entitlement short-circuits that cycle: prayer, answer to prayer, period. No gratitude. No act of thanksgiving.

How did the one leper show his gratitude?

...when he saw that he was healed, [he] turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. (Luke 17:15-16a)

He’s so excited, so thankful, he splits off from the group, makes a U-turn, and goes back to Jesus instead of proceeding on to see the priest. St. Luke is the only one who tells this story, and he says the man was *praising God with a loud voice*. In my book that means he was making a holy ruckus! His excitement and gratitude could not be contained! Think about it. When’s the last time you were **that** grateful for anything?

There’s a homily help website named *salt* and this week’s reflection on the Gospel says if we receive a gift without experiencing joy and giving thanks, the gift isn’t complete.

...the act of thanksgiving deepens and completes the act of receiving a blessing. Think of a child who receives a meal from her parents, a dish they’ve specially prepared for her as a gift: if she simply consumes it as a plate of fuel, or devours it as a privilege, or thoughtlessly enjoys it as an

indulgence – in fact she misses the truth of her situation. She misses the gift.¹

I think they chose parents feeding a child because we are children of our Father in Heaven, the Source of all blessings in our lives, regardless of whether or not we recognize them, value them, are consciously grateful for them, or sadly are oblivious to them, or ungratefully view them as our due.

When a child is born, I love to pray that the little one will grow in **grace** and not just age all the days of a long life. We can pray that prayer for ourselves as well. That we will grow in grace, not just in years, that we will mature spiritually, becoming more and more aware of and grateful for the blessings with which our God showers us. That same *salt* reflection says that “Gratitude... is the natural echo of grace.”²

The word for the grateful leper giving thanks is *euchariston*, the same as the word Eucharist we use as a synonym for Holy Communion. This meal is an outpouring of God’s grace and an opportunity for us to express our thanksgiving for the gift of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whom we are baptized and who comes to us again and again in the Word of God and in the Holy Supper. Our presence in this gathering of the community for worship is **our** expression of thanksgiving to God, as surely as the leper expressed his thanks by making a U-turn, creating a holy ruckus of praise, and diving at Jesus’ feet in joyful gratitude. Let’s not minimize the importance of thanking God with our feet (coming here), and taking a seat in this (or any) sanctuary. “I can thank God as well on the golf course or in the boat or at home” doesn’t require any effort on our parts, does it? Are we willing to give God the gift of time? There’s no more precious way to be in Jesus’ presence and offer our hearts than by receiving the gift of Holy Communion. We don’t need to “show

ourselves to the priest,” as Jesus commanded the lepers, but we do need to show ourselves to God.

St. Luke is the only one who tells the story of the Good Samaritan and the story of Grateful Samaritan in today’s Gospel. What’s the importance of the Samaritan identity of the man who had mercy on the wounded traveler in the ditch, and the one-in-ten who returns to give thanks?

The Jews considered Samaritans to be religious heretics, ethnic half-breeds, and basically a lesser life-form. They were foreigners. They were the enemy. Long, sad history there. But Jesus seems to be saying that the outsider is as beloved as the insider, and that the one we ostracize is embraced by Him and has a lot to teach us. Again, from *salt*:

Like the Good Samaritan parable, this passage is an occasion for reflecting on whom we consider to be our adversaries, people we put “outside the circle” of acceptability. [Are our adversaries] those from whom we’re estranged, or about whom we’re suspicious? Is it those on the other side of the political aisle, or the religious (or non-religious) aisle? And then, once we have those opponents in mind: What can we learn from them? What do they model about the essence of life, about loving God and neighbor, about living with gratitude and mercy?³

Challenging, right? What if we think of this Gospel as being about the Grateful Samaritan rather than the Ten Lepers? What if we reflect on those we view as modern-day lepers, and how we treat them, and how Jesus **wants** us to treat them? What if we entertain the possibility that we have a lot left to learn and they have something to teach us? Amen

¹*salt*, “Thinking is Believing: SALT’s Commentary for Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost,” p.4.

²*Ibid*.

³*Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

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