

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 17: 11-19

"Acknowledging the Source"

Jesus looks around and asks, "*where are the other nine?*" That is a question that could be asked at many things. At this particular time He asks – "*where are the other nine?*" We are going to look into that this morning. One man, the outsider, the foreigner, gives God the glory, showing up the Jews whose very name reminded them to praise God - the word "Judah" in Hebrew means 'praise.'

It is not only the nine ex-lepers who are shown up, but when you think about it - it is all of us who fail to thank God 'always and for everything', as Paul puts it in Ephesians 5:20, "*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Every single book in the New Testament has a purpose. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a letter to the church. When you get a chance take a look at it and read it – it might touch your heart. God is the giver of all things: every morsel of food we eat, every breath of air we breathe, every note of music we hear, every smile on the face of a friend, a child, a spouse – all that, and a million things more, are good gifts from God's generosity.

Now, here are 10 men demonstrating their faith in God by setting out for the local synagogue, to show themselves to the priests, and their faith is rewarded. If you were a leper, you could not live with your family, you could not live in the village, you would have to live outside because you were unclean. Only after you showed yourself to the priest and he proclaimed you clean, then you could come back and be with everybody. Then one of them, when he discovers he's been healed, turns around and comes back to Jesus to thank Him. And notice what he does; he comes "*praising God in a loud voice.*" (Luke 17:15) He wasn't trying to hide what was going on in his life. Sometimes people can be very 'mealy mouthed' and speak very softly. NO! Let it rip! Let heaven hear it! He praised God in a loud voice recognizing that the power to heal him has come from God, that God's power came through Jesus and he wants everyone to know about it. And when he gets to Jesus he throws himself to the ground in an act of homage, aware of Jesus' power and thanking Him for this truly wonderful gift that he has been given. It is not just on the outside, this man has been made whole, and we connected with his family. His family is not in the town, because this man is different. Now comes the truly amazing part, the Gospel says, "*And he was a Samaritan.*" (Luke 17:16) He was a member of a nation of people that wanted nothing to do with the Jews - and vice versa. Yet here he was returning to acknowledge his debt to this Jewish teacher, rabbi and healer.

Just to give you some background of the difference between the Jews and Samaritans, the Samaritans remained in Israel while the Jews in Jerusalem were sent into exile in Babylon. The Temple was destroyed – that beautiful Solomon's Temple was destroyed. The Samaritans believe that Mount Gerizim was the original Holy Place of Israel from the time that Joshua conquered Canaan. And so, the major issue between Jews and Samaritans has always been the location of where to worship God. We don't have that problem. You can worship God in the pew, you can worship God in a coffee house, you can worship God in your car. We don't have to

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go to a temple. Thank God we come to church so we can worship God together as a family. The Jews worshipped on the Temple Mount, on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim according to Samaritans.

Jesus looks around and asks, "*Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?*" (Luke 17:17) Was this Samaritan the only one to come back and give praise to God? I think we can assume that the others were Jews. The big question is why hadn't they come back? Well, maybe they were so overcome with the joy of being healed that the thought hadn't crossed their minds that they should return to thank Jesus. Or maybe they were afraid that if they came back before they carried out His instruction that the healing wouldn't be permanent. On the other hand they may have been so intent on completing the requirements of the Jewish law that they wouldn't stop until they got to the priests and were declared clean again. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that only this one man, a Samaritan, returned to give thanks to God and to acknowledge what had happened in his life at the hands of Jesus. And so it was to this man alone that Jesus could say "*Rise and go, your faith has made you well.*" (Luke 17:19)

Like the prodigal son, this man 'was dead, and is alive again.' He was an outcast and not allowed to be near his family, or any other people – only other lepers. New life, the life which Israel was longing for as part of the age to come, had arrived in this village that day, and it had called out of him a faith he didn't know he had. Once again, faith and healing go hand in hand. We see that 'faith' here means not just any old belief, any generally religious attitude to life, but the belief that the God of life and death is at work in and through Jesus, and trusting in Him will bring the miraculous. This faith and gratitude is what being a Christian, in the first or the twenty-first century, is all about.

I have to ask you, why were the ten lepers healed? Was it their faith that brought about their cure? Was it like the demoniac in the Gerasenes, who Jesus decided to heal and that it was His power, and not their faith in Jesus that they were healed? Was it that same reason that Jesus wanted to give them the gift, and it had nothing to do with their faith? Could it be that nine of them failed to return to thank Jesus might mean that they didn't really believe in Him? They had no problem saying 'Jesus, help us – heal us.'

Immediately before this account Jesus has been talking to His apostles about faith. As we saw last Sunday, they ask Jesus to increase their faith; and Jesus tells them "*If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*" (Luke 17:6) Isn't it amazing that this incident with the ten lepers comes right after Jesus speaking about faith. Could it be that nine of the lepers had only a tiny amount of faith, but it was still enough for them to be healed?

But what about the other man? The fact that he returned seems to indicate that he recognized Jesus to more than just a healer, more than just a preacher and teacher. He started out just like the other nine, interested in being healed, "*and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*" (Luke 17:13) When Jesus saw them, He said, "*Go, show yourselves to the priests.*"

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And as they went, they were cleansed.” (Luke 17:14) It didn’t just happen like a snap of the fingers, but as they went suddenly they were healed. They didn’t become lepers with the snap of a finger, but it came on them and grew, and decayed – so as they walked – they were healed. When this Samaritan realized what had happened to him, he turned around, made a B-line, forgetting about the high priest and came back to offer his thanks, his gratitude, and his praise to God and give thanks to Jesus.

There’s a close link between the man’s praise of God and his approach to Jesus, as though his throwing himself on the ground before Jesus is an act of worship. And he’s rewarded for his greater level of faith by Jesus’ acknowledgment of his faith. He’s not just been healed, he’s also now come into a relationship with the King of creation, with the King of Kings, with the Prince of Peace, with the Great Healer, and that new relationship is the source of healing not just of his leprosy, but of all that separates him from God.

How does faith develop? Is your faith still developing? I think that we are all ‘works in progress.’ Which is pretty cool because God loves us no matter what. We are not perfect; we never will be – but He loves us still – enough to go to the cross. The faith of this one man jumped leaps and bounds in just a matter of minutes – grew in just a matter of minutes. And he was a Samaritan, a foreigner to God’s people in Jerusalem. If that’s the case then how much more should we expect our faith to continue growing throughout our life when we have God’s Holy Spirit living within us? When we are baptized we receive the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our hearts, dwelling within us. The Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians says: “*Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand.*” (2 Corinthians 10:15) Is there anyone in here whose faith level meter is way up to the top? We are all works in progress. Don’t kick yourself if all of a sudden doubt creeps in one day, and you are saying to yourself ‘hmm, I wonder, is He going to be mad at me?’ He loves you; He loves you! He want to help your ‘faith meter’ to grow. Will it ever get to the top and exceed? Who knows. Just love Him all the same. Read about Him – here (holding up the Bible) – I love the red letters. We are works in progress. Paul expected that their faith would continue to grow, resulting in an expanded ministry of sharing the gospel. That should be our hope as well. If our faith starts off like a mustard seed, we should expect it to grow like a mustard seed – when it is watered and nurtured it becomes a large tree. The thing about seeds is that they have to be watered don’t they? Seeds need to grow – just like we do. Jesus’ encouragement to this one man who returned was His way of watering that seed of faith. And in fact the man himself had watered it already in a sense, by his very act of returning to the source, acknowledging the source of his healing, falling and throwing himself at Jesus feet, of acknowledging the miracle that had taken place. It’s a bit like the parable of the sower and the soils. The seeds in that parable grew where they found soil that welcomed them and gave them nourishment. When this man returned to kneel at Jesus’ feet, the man was nourishing his faith, that may have been as small as a mustard seed, by focusing on the source of his healing, the one who represented God’s power on earth.

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But how do we feed our faith so it grows? Well, like this Samaritan, by keeping our eyes on Jesus. It might be coming to church on Sunday, getting together and discussing our faith with other Christians, coming on a Wednesday night and be fed physically and spiritually. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews encourages us to: *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”* (Hebrews 12:2-3)

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. That is, love is the way that faith expresses itself. But isn't it also true that showing love is a way of increasing our faith? It is because of the source of that love. The Apostle John wrote *“We love because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19) We acknowledge the source. So as we show love to others we reflect the love of God towards us, and so each loving act reminds us of God's love.

Like the Samaritan in this story, when we see God working, all we can do is to come with praise and thanks to His feet. That in itself will strengthen our faith for the next time we seek to rely on Him. The more we acknowledge God's involvement in our lives, the more we'll expect it, and the more it will become a natural part of life. This Samaritan, along with his nine companions, was healed both by the power of God and because of his faith in Jesus. But what really made the difference in this story was that he returned to kneel at Jesus feet to begin a personal relationship with the source of that healing. Let's pray that when God works in our lives, however that might be, that we'll recognize it and show the same praise and gratitude that this man did.