

Gratitude  
Luke 17:11-19  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
October 9, 2016 / 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Today's selection is a story that is paralleled in the other Gospels, but what makes Luke's version unique is the number of lepers, the inclusion of a foreigner, and the implication of those two elements.

Luke's Gospel is characterized by focusing on Jesus' healing ministry and Jesus' compassion. This selection is part of the ten chapter block where Jesus is leisurely heading towards Jerusalem and the Crucifixion. The previous chapter, leading to this, is all about the use and abuse of wealth, and in this chapter, Luke is focusing on forgiveness, faith, ingratitude, and the Kingdom of God. This chapter starts with some sayings and lessons, followed by a parable on servitude, then our selection begins, the story of The Grateful Samaritan.

To start, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem from Galilee; and in order to go from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south, He would have to travel through Samaria, located between the two administrative areas.

While traveling toward a village, He is met by a group of lepers. Back then, the word "leprosy" was used to refer to a variety of skin diseases, not just what we know today as leprosy. In ancient times, lepers were segregated from the rest of the community. They were outcasts! Excluded from society, isolated from family, loved ones, and any other human contact.

Imagine yourself in a similar situation, where people recoil at the sight of you, run to avoid you, and call you "unclean." You'd be ignored as well, unable to adequately feed yourself; you'd be living a miserable existence.

Now imagine yourself in the position of those ten lepers, kept out on the fringes of the village limits, and you hear word of a greater healer, or a powerful prophet, or perhaps even the Messiah that Isaiah had foretold, is coming down the road, right now, right towards you! Maybe this person can cure you and then you can rejoin the community. Maybe He can end your exile by making you clean again and acceptable to the rest of the community.

The end of that miserable existence.

Jesus heals them and sends them to be examined by the priests. Only they can determine if a person has been healed and ready for the mikvah, the ritual bath that is the final step of making a person clean again. Jesus is following the regulations of divine healing, verification of cleanliness, and reintegration into society to the letter! This is all in the Torah, and not even Jesus' enemies can find fault with anything that was done in this case!

So now imagine how those ten lepers must have felt. What they heard was true! They have not only been healed, they have been officially declared clean. They are now allowed back into the village, they have human contact again, and they can be with your loved ones again. No longer unclean, no longer untouchable, no longer an outcast.

How would that make you feel? What happened to them was life-changing for the better. I would hope that you would feel gratitude. We can only guess what nine of those lepers felt, because only one of them, the foreigner, the enemy, the heretic, a Samaritan, turned back to express his gratitude to God and Jesus for what They did.

Jesus noticed this lack of gratitude from His fellow Galileans, and then gave an additional blessing to the Grateful Samaritan.

I wonder how Jesus felt with that lack of gratitude. Any one of us, I would think, would be hurt if we were treated like that. Maybe even disinclined from doing something for other people again, if they didn't even bother with saying "thank you."

This reminds me of a story that I have been told, with some variations by multiple members of this church, about the history of this church. As part of, I think it was, the Fourth of July celebrations, many decades ago, the Women's Fellowship made salads for the picnic. So many salads were made, enough to feed the whole town, and I've seen from the recently uncovered records, how much planning and effort that went into these salads.

Now, some people had their salads placed on the main table, and these were sought after salads. Then there were salads made by the younger women, who would have their salads instead placed in the kitchen, and they might not even be brought out and served. Only if everything else was eaten, maybe theirs would be served.

Can you imagine how that would have felt? To volunteer your time and talents, then see your efforts literally hidden from sight? Like it was something embarrassing or something to be ashamed of. Would you even want to volunteer or give something of yourself in an environment like that, where you are treated like that?

Luckily, when Jesus was treated with ingratitude, He still continued to heal, to teach, and ultimately to sacrifice Himself for us all.

On the flip side, during the lead up to the Colebrook Fair last year, I tried to make several items for the bake sale. For two days, I was running up and down the hill to the grocery to get more supplies, and working on making things, and honestly, baking is not really in my skill sets. For example, I learned the hard way that when using a double boiler to melt butterscotch, you have to make sure that no moisture gets in it. Anyway, I finally finished several items and brought them over to our Bake Sale table. The member running the table accepted them with much gratitude. That made me feel appreciated, and I no longer cared about the stress that the making had caused, nor the mess in the kitchen that I had waiting for me. All because of the gratitude shown.

And when this year's Fair came around, the same member expressed gratitude yet again, and hoped that I would make the same things again. This kind of overflowing gratitude not only made me want to do so, but made me want to make even more.

A lack of gratitude, like that of the nine lepers, can have long-term effects on a person's life or the operations of an organization. It can convince a person that their efforts are not wanted, so they give their time and gifts elsewhere. Who would want to be in that situation, where they feel unappreciated. It could be so easy to make sure that people feel appreciated, by showing gratitude, just saying thank you. And a person who feels appreciated, that they and their efforts are valued, they will feel good about themselves and what they've done; they may be willing to go further and do more. So much good can come from showing gratitude to someone, even for something simple like holding open a door, that it is a wonder when it is not shown.

It's so easy to say two simple words, that hold so much power and greatness, that we should never withhold them from anyone. It can do so much to remember to say: Thank You.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

It was in the borderlands that Jesus met a band of lepers, whose livelihood was begging, whose status was untouchable, and touched their lives with hope. And it was the Samaritan, the one most of all an outsider, who turned back to give thanks. May we always remember his example, to always show gratitude to You and to all who serve. May Thanks always be on our lips!  
Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

Loving God, in Your faithfulness to us, You shower us with grace, mercy, love, and all that we need; we pray that You would shape our hearts, that they would be filled with gratitude, that we might always return to You and give You thanks.

O God, we so often take You for granted. You challenge us, encourage us, confront us, and accept us. Give us the faith to see You in everything and everyone. We pray that You forgive us, and guide us through the wilderness of the world, and lead us home.

We pray for our neighbors. We ask for comfort to those in distress. We ask for wellness to those unwell in mind, body, or spirit. We ask for refuge for those uprooted by fire, flood, or famine. We ask for justice for those who are victims of violence, and their families. We pray for wisdom for those who make decisions that effect many lives. We pray for safety for those who risk their lives for others. We also ask that You guide the hands of those who are in a position to use their gifts to help others.

We pray for ourselves. We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, and for Your strength of spirit to do what is right, and to act generously towards all, full of Christ's Love. We offer to You, the prayers of our hearts, both silent and spoken, confident that You will hear them and respond.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to You, that we all may be one with You, as You are one with us in Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

### Psalm 66:1-12

66:1 Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

66:2 sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.

66:3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

66:4 All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Selah

66:5 Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

66:6 He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.

There we rejoiced in him,

66:7 who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations-- let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah

66:8 Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

66:9 who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

66:10 For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

66:11 You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;

66:12 you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

### Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."