

Grateful

[2 Timothy 2:8-15](#)

[Luke 17:11-19](#)

The grateful Samaritan – the one person who comes back and thanks Jesus is a foreigner. This is great gospel reading to have in our Season of Gratitude, with the Gratitude Dinner coming up this Friday and the celebration of St. Benedict, our patron saint, next Sunday. So let's start this morning by thinking about things we're grateful for. I'm grateful for the Saturday night eucharist, for coffee, for my cats and my home... now it's your turn. Please find someone and share at least three things that you are grateful for.

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Now let's go a little deeper into this gospel reading. It starts off telling us that "On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee." That's a bit odd. It's like talking about the region between California and Nevada. There isn't one – either you're in one state or the other. It's possible that there was an area where the boundary was uncertain but that seems unlikely because the Jews were very concerned about purity and the Samaritans were considered unclean. You would think they would have wanted to know for sure when they were in one place or the other.

The lepers lived outside of society precisely because of the purity system. Because they had sores on their skin they were considered unclean. Scholars generally agree that this was not the kind of leprosy that we know today but some more general skin condition. Nonetheless, they were unclean and so they lived in a between place – in the region between Samaria and Galilee. They were stateless persons. Today there are estimated to be over 10million stateless people – people who have no citizenship, no country or nation to call home, and a third of those are children.

So Luke, the gospel writer, has placed these ten people not only outside society because of their skin condition, but in a not-quite-here, not-quite-there place. And it happens that Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to his mock trial and execution, passes through that same place. I doubt that any of us mentioned a not-quite-here, not-quite-there place as something we are grateful for, yet many of us have that experience in at least part of our lives. And it's uncomfortable. We tend to long for things to be stable and comfortable, even somewhat predictable.

But when we are stable and comfortable it can be difficult for us to find Jesus. Because he is rarely stable and comfortable. Jesus was often on the move, stirring things up as he went. If those lepers had been comfortably in a leper colony somewhere they would not have been in the liminal place between Samaria and Galilee and seen Jesus also passing through the not-quite-here, not-quite-there place.

I wonder if this is where healing starts. Healing starts in the in-between place. Because that is when we are most aware of our need. We are aware of our need for healing when the structures of our lives are bending and shifting and we are uncomfortable. We are aware of our need when we feel that we don't belong, when family and friends seem far away and disconnected.

The ten lepers called out to Jesus. So much in the Biblical narrative starts with someone calling out. Most often it's us humans – like the Hebrews in Egypt when Yahweh said that he had heard their cries and so as sending Moses. Sometimes the call comes from God - calling Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah. According to John the whole of creation starts with the word.

Jesus responded to their call. Our calls are powerful, because they open us to God and they allow God to move in our lives. I think this is one way to understand that rather troubling phrase we heard in the New Testament reading from the letter to Timothy, “if we deny him, he will also deny us”. God does not force himself upon us and if we choose to ignore the possibility of God's grace then God will hold back until we are ready. It is our invitation which enables God to work in amazing ways. That is why we pray. We pray so that our energy will be engaged with God's, so that divine power can enter the world through us and through the strength of our intention and our hope.

So the lepers called and Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priest – this was the way you got re-admitted to society – you showed your clean skin to the priest. And they went, and we are told that it was in the going that they were made clean. They didn't suddenly have clean skin. They started to go towards the priest, trusting that it would not be a fools errand, and in the going they were healed. Sometimes we pray and pray and nothing seems to happen. Nothing happens because we are standing still waiting to be made clean before we start moving.

“Be the change you want to see” is often true. When we start to move towards health then we find that God is the wind beneath our wings. When we move towards the wholeness we long for, then God's grace moves with us, giving us greater energy. It may not look like we expect but God is there with us and working for the highest good of all beings.

I wonder how it was for that Samaritan? For so long he had made community with others in the same predicament. In their stateless, liminal existence these ten people had been a support for one another. But now he was clean. Now he could return to his own home, but he was changed.

It must have been both exhilarating and scary.

The Hungarian-American theoretical physicist, Edward Teller said, “When you come to the end of all the light you know, and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: Either you will be given something solid to stand on or you will be taught to fly.”

Transformation can be scary. There are times when we need to make big changes, let go of old habits, old relationships and step into the new. But we can be sure that when we step forward in faith, God is there with us. When we are in the liminal in-between place God is there. God is there, always moving toward Jerusalem, always prepared to continue the journey of sacrificial love which is the redemption of the world.

And for that, we can be grateful, beyond words.