

Sermon	Proper 23
Luke 17, v11-19	St Michaels

Saying thank you to me is one of the most important things you can do. My parents would say that to not say thank you is an indicator that you have not been brought up properly – and I suppose that our society today, with the sheer business of life, it is sometimes too easy to perhaps make an excuse for not saying thank you – in fact often when I have done things, just the words thank you can mean so much.

This passage we heard from Luke this morning poignantly tells another story of a failure to offer thanks. This miracle, peculiar to Luke, has Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, passing through the area of Samaria, when he was accosted by ten lepers. The lepers came to Jesus with desperate longing; such was their faith that they called Jesus “Master”. They started to hurry away to see the

Priest, and inform him that they had been cured, even before the cure was complete. But in due course, only one came back to thank Jesus. Regrettably it is a failing of human nature, that so often after we have got what we want, we never come back. But what if we were to think of gratitude as an expression of faith; or even that they were one and the same?

In so many of the healing stories in the gospels, Jesus heals people because of their faith; it is this very faith that compelled them to come to him seeking his healing touch. Believing that he had the power to make them well.

Jesus tells the grateful Samaritan leper, the one who came back, that his faith has healed him as well, but this time it is the foreigner’s faithful gratitude and praise of God that heals him. Because in that gratitude, the

foreigner also faithfully acknowledged something special about Jesus. Something very unique. Just look at what he did, he turned back, he praised God in a loud voice and importantly he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.

Often if you are trying to get help from someone, you would often not thank that person until they had actually helped you. You might thank God in prospect for help to come. But you would not thank another person until the favour asked was completed.

What this means is that the nine lepers who went on their way and did what Jesus told them to do were not so much being rude. They were just doing the normal thing under such circumstances, much like we would probably do today. They would thank the priest who declared them clean, because that was the point when all was completed.

It kind of makes you wonder even more if the nine lepers were any better men because of their cure; we are led to believe that they were just in better health. But the Samaritan's return to Jesus was special; not only because of his special expression of gratitude, but also because he was showing himself to the priest! Jesus was the priest and this Samaritan recognized that! Jesus saw the great faith of this man expressed in many ways, declared him whole, and sent him on his way.

Yes, the other nine had been healed, but only this one received Jesus' declaration of salvation. It was the man's faith in Jesus Christ the Priest, expressed in sincere and thanksgiving that saved him – it was that, that brought him complete healing.

Faith, like thanksgiving, is our response to the grace of God as we have experienced it. For those who have

become aware of God's grace, all of life is filled with a sense of thanksgiving. The Samaritan, because of his praising God, was really whole, in soul as well as in body, for all eternity.

Jesus saw the need of the lepers and he acted on it. When the leper saw healing, he did not just celebrate his good fortune; he returned to praise God and fall on his face before Jesus. Some would believe, that saying thanks is the purest measure of our character and spiritual condition. As believers, we need to be aware that thanksgiving opens up our lives for God's will to be done in and through us.

In a sense, gratitude is an expression not only of faith, but also of modesty. In Hebrew, the word for gratitude is *hoda'ah*, the same as the word for confession. To offer

thanks is to confess dependence, to acknowledge that others have the power to benefit us, and to admit that our life is better because of their efforts.

And our lives are better because of the work of God in Jesus Christ. We are greatly blessed because of the love of Jesus Christ. But I wonder if our thanksgiving to God is reflective of his generosity to us?

In our world today, and the society we live in, it is so easy to become caught up in our "rights;" to become bitter and angry when we do not get all that we are "entitled" to. The absence of gratefulness reveals self-centeredness or the attitude that I deserve more than I ever get, so I do not need to be grateful.

But if we stop and be grateful, then there is joy! Many will remember the old saying of "count your blessings". Just

think of the happiness that comes in living a thankful life; in pouring out all our praise upon those who give of themselves, in whatever way, for our benefit! Life itself is a gift!

How often do we pour our gratitude out to our waiting Father, who has so blessed us? The short answer is probably not often enough.

God gave us his only Son – the ultimate gift and sacrifice if you like, yet how often do we give him our words of thanks for all He does in the our lives. It is sometimes all too easy to forget to say “thank you” to those who help us in our daily life, perhaps because they do so much for us. It is also easy to forget to thank God. Perhaps the best thanks we can give him is to try to deserve his goodness and mercy a little better. This miracle of the story of the ten lepers reminds us that if our faith is genuine, we will

never cease praising God for the many blessings of our lives!

Amen.