

## **That Attitude of Gratitude (Once Again)**

Poper23, Year C, RCL. 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c. Psalm 111. 2 Timothy 2:8-15. Luke 17:11-19. The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost. October 9, 2016. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

Not all scripture is difficult. Today's reading from Luke, the story of the healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), is pretty straightforward. It's about a topic that is dear to preachers, and rightly so: the attitude of gratitude.

Leprosy did not just mean what we nowadays call Hansen's disease; it was a catch-all term for disfiguring, persistent skin diseases. Even houses could get leprosy (we call it mold). It made a person (or a house) ritually unclean under Jewish purity law. If it went away, it took a priest—the local licensed religious professional, so to speak—to certify that the individual (or dwelling) was now clean. That's why Jesus instructs the ten lepers go to show themselves to the priests—it's so they can get certified that they are now disease-free. Their healing happens on the way and they just keep going.

Except for one of them. As a Samaritan, he might have been a little reluctant to go to a Jewish religious expert, since Jews and Samaritans did not get along. (Still don't. There are still a few Samaritans, living in the Holy Land in about the same place they did in Jesus' time. The Jews and the Samaritans are a good example, among many, of two groups who were originally closely related but whose differences from one another have become entrenched over time.)

So, whatever the details of his motivation, the Samaritan returns to thank Jesus and praise God for his healing. He may have been a religious outsider, but he was not outside the grace of God. We will surely recall the story of the good Samaritan who did right by the injured traveler when the Jews who passed by would not offer help. The message is mighty clear: when God acts to save, to heal, to rescue, the right response is gratefulness. God, having no pride, will use any agent, any means, any method to save, heal and rescue. When we notice those saving things in life, it's God. And anybody can notice; many a life has been led to God through gratitude.

It has been well said that *gratefulness is the heart of prayer*. That's actually the title of a book (and a good one) by Brother David Steindl-Rast, a noteworthy Christian teacher of contemplative prayer.

Whenever we notice anything that draws us out of our sense of befuddlement or beleaguerment or entitlement and gives us that thankful sense of delight in the generosity of that which is beyond our own doing or our own deserving or our own expectations and even our hopes, that is such a basic good thing for our character that Cicero, that wise and eloquent old Roman, called gratitude the parent of all other virtues. And gratitude is a basic good thing for our relationship with God (and all God's creatures, for it is the foundation of charity).

There is, of course, another impulse toward prayer: *fear*. When they say there are no atheists in foxholes, that's what they're talking about. When we are sore beset, it is a normal

impulse to cry out to whatever superior force in the universe may exist for care, for help, for rescue. So if danger, threat and pain are the basis for petitionary prayer—asking for things—well, that’s good as far as it goes. But the impulse of the heart to gratitude is the impulse to appreciate the essential generosity and creative abundance of God. It is the impulse of love given and received.

God wants us both to rely on him and to appreciate him. And he wants us to treat others in the same faithful, loving way he treats us. Gratitude is essential. Any leper wants to be healed; any leper would call out to an itinerant holy man passing by, hoping for healing. But the circle is only complete when we give thanks and praise.

And now I will share the deeper mystery. Christians are called to give thanks and praise *whatever happens*, honoring the God whose love cannot be everlastingly disfigured by the distresses caused by evil in the world. When Jesus tells the leper who returned to thank him, “Get up and go on your way,” the word for “get up” is “rise up,” in Greek *anastás*—the word that raises the dead to new life. The Easter greeting in Greek is *Christós anéstē*—Christ is risen. The word for resurrection is *anástasis*.

To us whose grateful hearts return us to Christ our healer, the word from God is resurrection.

❖ This sermon has been slightly modified from the one preached at the Shared Ministry on October 13, 2013.