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**Attitude of Gratitude**

**October 9, 2016**

**Luke 17:11-19**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the one to whom we owe our greatest thanks and praise, Jesus Christ Our Savior, amen.

It turns out, giving thanks is good for you. A growing body of research suggests that maintaining an “attitude of gratitude” can improve psychological, emotional and physical well-being. Adults who frequently feel grateful have more energy, more optimism, more social connections and more happiness than those who do not, according to studies conducted over the past decade. They're also less likely to be depressed, envious, greedy or alcoholics. They earn more money, sleep more soundly, exercise more regularly and have greater resistance to viral infections. Now, researchers are finding that gratitude brings similar benefits in children and adolescents. Kids who feel and act grateful tend to be less materialistic, get better grades, set higher goals, complain of fewer headaches and stomach aches and feel more satisfied with their friends, families and schools than those who don't. It turns out that simply counting your blessings on a regular basis is all that’s needed to help you live a happier, better life.

In our Gospel story today ten lepers were made clean by Jesus, but only one of them stopped to give thanks and to worship Jesus. The more I looked at this story the more confused I got. First off, the ten lepers all acted in faith as they called out to Jesus for mercy. They all recognized Jesus as someone who could make them clean from their disease. They all trusted Jesus and acted in faith as they began the journey to go show themselves to the priests for verification that they were in fact clean. They all started out obeying Jesus despite seeing no visible evidence of their healing. It was only when they were on the way to the priest when the miracle cure happened. Isn’t that faith? If faith is trusting Jesus, then they should all be poster children for faith. Yet, Jesus reprimands the nine who simply obeyed him and went on to see the priest even after they discovered they were cured. The Samaritan foreigner was the only one who disobeyed Jesus. He didn’t press on to find the priest, who probably wouldn’t have had anything to do with him because of his status as a hated Samaritan. Instead he came back to express his gratitude for what Jesus had done. In this act, Jesus tells him, over and above the others, who were simply obeying what Jesus had told them to do, Jesus tells this Samaritan, go, your faith has made you well.

What am I’m missing in this story? Is faith something more than just trusting Jesus? Is it more than acting on that trust and stepping out in obedience without knowing for sure what lay ahead? I found the answer to my confusion when I closely looked at what the Samaritan actually did when he discovered he had been made clean. Let’s remember what this miracle meant to all ten of those Lepers. In Jesus’ time Leprosy included any skin malady. It could be a simple skin rash, eczema, or any of several much more devastating and contagious conditions like the modern day version of Leprosy we call Hansen’s Disease or even the terrifying Necrotizing Fasciitis which we know as the Flesh Eating Bacteria. PJ told me she took care of a man who had this disease last week and nobody wanted to even look at his wound let alone take care of it.

Back to the first century… At the first sign of any type of rash or skin discoloration you were literally thrown out of town. You lost your job, your house, your family, and everything that you knew to be your normal life. Gone, it was all gone. Lepers formed colonies on the outskirts of towns near the roads so they could beg for alms from travelers. The law stated they had to dress in tattered clothing and when anyone approached they had to yell out that they were unclean so as to warn the passersby. On the other hand, when Jesus made them clean and after their status was verified by the priest, they got it all back; the house, the family, job, everything. My guess is all ten were grateful for being restored to health, but more so for being restored to their community, household, and family. I’m still left with the question of what makes our Samaritan different.

The answer lies in who gets the credit. Once again all ten trusted Jesus and my guess is even the nine who didn’t return were thankful to Jesus for restoring them. The difference is the Samaritan returned praising God and then prostrated himself or laid down at Jesus feet. This is an act of worship. The difference is the Samaritan recognized the one who had given him back his life was not just a man named Jesus with some special gift of healing. He made the connection that Jesus and God are one and the same. Out of all the ten Lepers only the Samaritan is said to have praised God and worshipped Jesus. He recognized all his blessings, his home, family, possessions, his job, even his health come from God, through Jesus.

I didn’t intend to turn this into a stewardship sermon, but stewardship screams out to be acknowledged. I’m not talking about money or fund raising, although both are a part of stewardship. I’m talking about stewardship in the broadest sense of the word. Stewardship is what a steward does. The word steward isn’t really used much anymore. It’s an old English word. A steward is someone who stays in a house or farm and in return for taking care of the property, gets to stay there and use the owners stuff. There are many stories in the Bible of good and bad stewards. Here’s my example of a steward. When we lived in Fairborn, Trevor’s best friend, William, practically lived with us. So, when we went on vacation we would ask him to stay at our house and take care of our two dogs. In return he got to use our stuff, eat the food in the freezer, and best of all escape the oversight of his parents for a week or so. William was a good steward. Now imagine if William had thrown wild parties, broken our priceless crystal, and left the place totally trashed. That would be a bad steward. If only humans were just bad stewards. That’s the least of our problems. Imagine if we returned from our vacation and William had changed the locks on the doors and refused to let us in. Imagine he told everyone it was his house. That would be a different and much more serious problem altogether.

That’s the problem the human race has. We forget we’re stewards and everything belongs to God. If we have a little or if we have a lot, it all comes from God on loan. We came into this world with nothing and we will leave this world someday with just the same, nothing. In between we get to use some of the abundance that belongs to God, but we don’t own it. The Samaritan understood this basic fact of life and when Jesus restored his life by making him clean and acceptable to society, the first thing he thought to do was to praise God and worship Jesus. He was grateful, he knew who was responsible for his blessing, and he was quick to express his attitude of gratitude by praising and worshiping Jesus.

The good news is gratitude isn’t something you have to be born with. It isn’t a scarce commodity with only just so much to go around. The truth is, you choose to have an attitude of gratitude. You can demonstrate your attitude of gratitude and it doesn’t cost you a penny. They don’t sell it in any store, but you can choose it any time you want. It’s like a muscle, the more you use it the stronger it gets. Thankful people, with an attitude of gratitude, focus on the good things they have instead of complaining about all the things they don’t have. Thankful people with an attitude of gratitude are the second happiest people on Earth according to Dr Mark Allen Powell, New Testament Professor at Trinity Seminary. I know you’re wondering who are the happiest people on Earth and I have good news to tell you there as well. What makes people the happiest people on Earth, is also a choice just like an attitude of gratitude. Hands down, the happiest people on planet Earth are generous people, but that’s the topic for another sermon on another day.

For now, may we recognize everything we have and everything we are belongs to God. Everything means everything. May you come to truly understand you bask in warm sunshine you had nothing to do with creating. You cool yourselves in the shade of trees you didn’t plant. You live in a house you didn’t build. You have ideas in your head given to you by others since there is truly nothing new under the sun. You inhabit a body you didn’t create. You breath air you didn’t produce. May we all give credit and glory to God for every breath, every moment of our lives as a free gift we neither earned not deserve. May the God of love continue to bless you, until the day you are called to be with him in glory, amen.