

## Sermon for Thanksgiving Sunday

“May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God”

We have stepped away today from our Gospel focus on Matthew and Jesus’ growing tensions with the religious leadership.

Today our Gospel message - our Good News comes from Luke. Luke was written later than Matthew and Mark and borrowed heavily from them. But Luke did have a different audience and often a different focus or point of view. Luke took the position that Jesus’ message was universal. It was not just for the Jews - it was for everyone. And it is this point of view that we see in today’s story. The story of the 10 Lepers and the 1 who turned back is unique to Luke.

Luke tells two stories where a Samaritan is the “good guy”. This would have been surprising and perhaps shocking for many people to hear.

There was a long history of dislike and even violence between the Jews and the Samaritans - why?? After all they were neighbours!

What was the cause of the hostility?

Jews and Samaritans had had a common history. They had been one people, however, changes and tensions came from exile and differing worship practices.

Samaria and Galilee had once been filled with the northern Israelite tribes who separated from Judah in the 10th C BCE and established a rival monarchy. These tribes were conquered by the Assyrians who brought in people from Mesopotamia. The result was centuries of intermarriage. As time passed the Samaritans developed their own religious traditions that emphasized devotion to the Torah and an affiliation with a sanctuary on Mt Gerizim.

In the 2nd C much of Galilee converted to Judaism which meant that they now recognized the primacy of the temple in Jerusalem. Samaria was now in the middle of a Jewish political “sandwich.” Tensions ran high and the Judeans destroyed the sanctuary of Mt Gerizim.

In Jesus’ time there was still animosity and hate. So the character of the grateful Samaritan leper would have still seemed wrong and shocking.

With the Samaritans there was a centuries old situation of “non Jew” and enemy. They had a shared ancestry and

overlapping religious beliefs, but it did not mean they could live in harmony!

As the story unfolds Jesus encounters 10 Lepers - they ask for healing - he heals and sends them on their way. But one turns back in disobedience. This story shows us that disobedience should take a back seat to exuberant gratitude.

Martin Luther was once asked to describe the nature of true worship. His response? The 10th leper turning back.

A Samaritan leper becomes a model for Thanksgiving.  
A Samaritan leper is a model of gratitude.

This weekend as we celebrate Thanksgiving let us consider gratitude. Gratitude should be the appropriate response to God's goodness, mercy and the gift of grace.

But is gratitude our 1st thought as we gather around the table with family and friends? Frequently there are tensions or complaints or old wounds present at the table along with the turkey! Human relationships can be challenging!

The Samaritan leper turns back and gives thanks for he recognizes what he now has. He will be able to once

again live in society. He has been marginalized - put on the outside - for he was doubly damned a Samaritan and Leper. There was no place for him. But Jesus does not see an enemy - Jesus does not see someone to be shunned or avoided. Jesus sees a child of God. Jesus sees someone in need of healing - someone asking for healing. And Jesus heals him. There are no requirements to be met - no money to be paid - no boxes to check - nothing - only the desire to be healed and the courage to ask.

But what about the 9 who did not turn back? Were they ungrateful? Or were they following Jesus' instruction to go and show the Priests? Were they ungrateful or did they just forget to express their thankfulness and gratitude in the right direction?

Sometimes we do not express our gratitude where it needs to be directed.

Love that springs from gratitude is the essence of faith.

Today in our Worship we focus on gratitude and being thankful. And maybe today we should also ask ourselves what is my attitude of gratitude? And do I ever forget God?

Even if we forget God, God does not forget us. God forgives us by forgetting our sins. This is good news! And this good news leads us to more thanksgiving and gratitude.

Today we heard the story of an outsider - a hated foreigner who asked Jesus for healing. And we heard that this man turned back in gratitude, and thanksgiving for healing. He knew what had been done for him. The verb used in the story for "thank" is the same one used when Jesus thanks God for the bread and the cup at the last supper. And it is the same word that is the basis for our word Eucharist. A word of thanksgiving and gratitude indeed.

AMEN