Sunday, October 11, 2026

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt
Scripture: Luke 17:11-19
Sermon Title: Thankful for What?
Transcribed by: Liza Perry

Let's begin with Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. We are here to thank God. And as we learned a couple of weeks ago, what do we know about God? There we go—His love endures forever. It was even stated in the psalm this morning.

And so today we're going to look at a story which the Gospel of Luke tells us in ***Luke 17***. We're going to look at a story of Jesus healing and one person who comes back to thank Him. But it is much deeper than just the one person coming back to thank Him.

And so I invite you to turn with me to ***Luke 17:11-19***. I invite you to keep your Bibles open or your phones open if you're doing it online, so that as we go through it, we can hear what the Lord is saying to us this morning.

Jesus Heals Ten Men With Leprosy

[11] Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.
[12] As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance
[13] and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" *[14] When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.*

[15] One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. *[16] He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.* *[17] Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?* *[18] Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"* *[19] Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's open in prayer.

Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we thank You that Your Word tells us and reminds us of our life in You. And so, Lord, as we listen, we pray, Lord, that You will open our ears, You will open our hearts, that the Holy Spirit may speak to us. And Lord, that we may be reminded of Your great love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This story which Luke tells us here comes in the middle of a number of things in which he is talking to his disciples about. And it begins with, *"Now on his way to Jerusalem."* Jesus right now is going to Jerusalem to be crucified. He has a mission. He is on His way because He knows that it is time for His crucifixion. And it says that He is between the borders of Samaria and Galilee.

Now, as He traveled, He was in the northern country of Galilee. And typically, what a Jew would do is they would cross the Jordan, come down on the other side of the Jordan, cross at Jericho, and then from Jericho, climb the mountain up to Jerusalem. There was this section between Galilee and Judea where Jerusalem is, which the Samaritans lived in. And they would avoid that place at all costs. And we'll find out more why later.

But, so this is where Jesus is. He's on this way, and He is focused on coming to Jerusalem. But as He's walking, hears from a distance the voices of ten lepers, ten people with this dreaded disease called leprosy.

Now, we know of leprosy now, and it's a single disease. But in Scripture, leprosy is a combination of many skin diseases. And some of us who have skin diseases which we realize are not contagious, and we can be around other people. At that time, if it was a skin disease, you were classified as a leper. And as a leper, you were isolated, because it was seen that all skin diseases were contagious.

And in order to prevent other people from getting this disease, you were isolated from family and from society. You had to go live in your own area. You had your own tent city. But not only were you separated from family and society, you were also separated from the temple and from worship.

For a Jew not to be able to go to the temple, not to be able to go in a place in which they can worship together with other people, that was very difficult, because worship at the time was not seen as something where you can do this wherever, but worship was at the temple. And so for a Jew to be a leper, that meant you now are on the outside. You are not allowed to be around family, you are not allowed to be around friends, but you are, more importantly, not allowed to come and worship God.

In ***Leviticus 13:45-46***, it gives an explanation as to what this means. It says, *"[45] "Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' [46] As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp."*

So here you have these people who have been completely isolated. And it says that as He was going into the village, that lepers met him at the end of ***Luke 17:12***. And it says, "*They stood at a distance [13] and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"* The actual words there are *"have mercy on us."* And notice how they yell this from a distance.

Now, I don't know about you, but I will admit there have been times in my life when I am focused on a mission and someone yells from a distance. And maybe some of you have had this as parents, or maybe some of you children have had this with your parents, that when you're on a mission and someone yells from a distance, you're thinking, *"I'm just going to pretend I didn't hear that. I'm just going to keep on moving. I know where I'm going."*

But Jesus doesn't do that. In fact, it doesn't say in ***Luke 17:14***, when hears them. It says, *"When he **saw** them."* Jesus sees them even at a distance. And I think for us, that is a good reminder as well.

Jesus, in the middle of His way to Jerusalem, as His mind is focused on this horrible event which will happen, He stops and sees the lepers. I think there are times when we may also feel that way. That Jesus, in the middle of taking care of everything else, doesn't necessarily have time for us. We might plead and we might think that He doesn't hear us.

But in the middle of His way to Jerusalem, Jesus stops. He sees them. And then He does something kind of interesting. In ***Luke 5***, there's another story where Jesus heals a leper. And in that story, He reaches out and touches the leper. And we read throughout the Gospel of Luke and throughout the other Gospels where Jesus would often touch someone and they would be healed.

We read about the blind man where He spit and made mud and rubbed mud on the guy's eyes. He would grab a person by the hand and heal them. Here He doesn't do that. Here, He simply says, *"Go and show yourself to the priests."* It's just a phrase.

In fact, when you read the stories, there is another time when a guy says, *"Don't come to my house. Just say the word and she'll be healed."*

They understood, *"Go and show yourselves to the priest."* Because at that time, it was the priest who would declare a person clean. Throughout the chapter of ***Leviticus 13***, it gives all the instructions as to what the priest is to do when he sees a person with a skin disease. And it is the priest who declares a person to be clean.

And so all Jesus says is, *"Go show yourself to the priests."* And at the end of ***Luke 17:14***, it says, *"As they went on their way, they were cleansed."* They were all healed.

Imagine that conversation, you know, as you're walking along, all of a sudden it's like, *"Wow, like, my hands don't have sores on them anymore."* And your face is clearing up. And they're watching each other all get better, and then they're beginning to sing. It's like, *"This is amazing. We can once again go back to our families. We can once again go to the temple and worship with our families."*

And so they are all excited and they all respond in faith because they all went and they were all cleansed. And so they all did exactly what Jesus told them to do. There they go.

In fact, I think sometimes we live that way as well. I need to pause here for a minute because don't we often think that obedience is thanks enough? Don't we often think that, you know, *“Just because I obeyed you, Lord, then You should be thankful, or I should be. That's showing my thanks. Just in my obedience.”*

And then one of them says, *"Hey, guys, we need to go back and thank Jesus."*

And so one returns, and as it says that he returns, it says that in ***Luke 17:15***, “*15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.”*

Do you notice how at the beginning it says that, *“They called out in a loud voice.”* And now it's, *“He's praising God in a loud voice?”* And the question which I asked myself this week is, *“Do I yell out as loud praising God as I do pleading to God? Do I give my thanks to God as loudly as when I need God to help me? Do I spend as much time in prayer and thanksgiving as I do in pleading for something or for someone?”*

Because this man, he came back in just the same tone in a loud voice praising God. And as he praises God in that loud voice, it is a place of worship because it says that he comes down and he lays himself at the feet of Christ, and his natural response is worship. But then it adds this little bit, *“And he was a Samaritan.”* That's just, you know, to put an extra point to this person who came to say thank you.

And I need to explain and maybe you already know the issue with Samaritans and Jews, and many of the commentators believe that the other nine were Jews and there was one Samaritan in the mix. We don't know that for sure, but we have to understand what a Samaritan is.

A Samaritan is a person who stayed behind during the exile and Assyria, when they captured countries that did this brilliant thing. They moved people all around. And by moving people all around, you end up with inter-country marriages, and you decrease the chance of an uprising occurring because now you've got people from all over.

And so a Samaritan was a mixed marriage Jew. A Jew who was no longer a pure Jew. So now they are married to somebody else. And a Samaritan has their own temple, they have their own place of worship. They are simply despised by the Jews. They are so despised by the Jews that if you're going to say something really bad to a person, you would wish that they were a Samaritan. That would be the worst thing that you could be.

And in fact, a few chapters before this, in ***Luke 10:25-37***, we see the parable of the Good Samaritan, where this man was on his way up to Jerusalem and he was robbed. And in this story of the parable of the Good Samaritan, you have a priest who walks by, you have a Levite who walks by, and both of them are like, *“I don't want to get defiled and touch a man who is bleeding or injured. I'm going to keep on walking.”*

And then you get a Samaritan who walks by. And in actuality, the first reaction of a Samaritan would not be, *“Let me help you.”* It's, *“Oh, they didn't finish the job. Let me finish the job and kill you.”* But no, the Samaritan is the one who helps.

And this story is told to a man who asks Jesus, *"What is the greatest commandment of all?"* And Jesus says, *"Love the Lord, your God, and your neighbor as yourself."* And then he says, *"Who is my neighbor?"* And Jesus tells this story, *"My neighbor is a Samaritan."*

To put this into perspective, ***Sam Storm*** says this, *"The Jewish people of the first century looked on Samaritans as ceremonially defiled, racially impure, and religiously heretical."*

As I was preparing for this, I thought, *"Are there people that I have set outside because I find them one of these three? Do I put myself in a place in which I go, 'You know, you just aren't quite up to it because you are one of these three?'"* And I am reminded of what Jesus says with, *"Who is my neighbor?"*

I love the way Jesus responds. And this is a very typical response for Jesus. "***17*** *Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed?"* Jesus knows all ten were cleansed. This is not a surprise to Him. He doesn't ask so that He may get an answer. He simply asks, *"Were not all ten cleansed?"* And of course the man says, *"Yes, all ten were cleansed."*

We have to think about this for a moment from the other nine because all ten were grateful in the moment. The nine were grateful in the moment and the one was grateful in the moment. Can you imagine these nice people?

Put yourselves in their shoes for just a moment. It has been years since you have had a hug from a family member. It has been years since anyone has touched you. It has been years since you have been in the presence of God in the temple. It has been years in which you have been yelled at anytime they see you, *"Unclean! Unclean!"* You have given yourself this name for years and suddenly you are clean.

Suddenly you know that you can go to the priest and when the priest declares you clean, you can go home and get that long awaited hug. Do you blame them for not going back?

I wondered this week if I was one of the nine, would I quickly run back or would I be so excited to see my family that I would just want to keep going and decide to come back and say thank you later.

The reality is the ten were like, "Let's get back to my life." But one noticed the difference. It wasn't getting back to his life. It was, "I need to get back to God who is the giver of life."

And do we recognize that? Do we recognize God as the giver of life? And that to be with Him and to thank Him is more important than our families? And I'm not saying our family is not important, they are. But in comparison, Jesus even said we need to leave our families to follow Him if necessary. He is the ultimate.

In ***Romans 2:4***, it says, *"**4** Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"*

Repentance.

When God displays His mercy to us, when God gives us all the many blessings that He does, it is because He loves us. Yes. But it is also an invitation to say, *“Come home to me. Because what I have for you is so much more than what you could ever have for yourself.”*

In fact, it's almost this aspect of, *“Do I want self sufficiency or do I live in praiseworthy dependence? Do I think I can do this on my own? Am I thankful for what I can do? Or do I live in full dependence at all times?”*

How many of us can be grateful today or tomorrow—Thanksgiving. Sunday led us in prayer about thanks and all the things that we have to be thankful for. But what about a week from now? What about two weeks from now? What about a month from now? Will we still be in that hyper mode of thanksgiving?

In some ways, I'll be honest with you, it is a shame that we have Thanksgiving one day a year. Should not every day be Thanksgiving?

This man comes back to Jesus, and he falls at His feet and he praises Him. And after Jesus asks the questions, He turns to the man and says to him, *"Rise and go. Your faith has made you well."* Jesus recognizes that as a person who wasn't even in the faith or considered an outsider, he is the one who understood the true gift. The gift wasn't physical healing. The gift was spiritual healing.

In fact, the literal translation for this passage says, *"Your faith has saved you."* It's not about being made physically well. It's about being made spiritually well. This man had a longing for wholeness. This man had a longing for cleanliness, to be clean again. But the nine were satisfied with the temporary. And the one understood that wholeness went a whole lot deeper than that.

And sometimes I wonder for myself, am I too easily satisfied with the temporary gifts that I have? Or do I live in light of the kingdom for the everlasting wholeness that comes with God?

See, leprosy was both physical and spiritual. Leprosy was not just a physical disease, but because of the separation from the temple and from worshiping God together, it was also a spiritual matter. And I think today some of us often spend time in leprosy as well. Not physically, but spiritually. Spiritually, we've put ourselves on the outside, either because we think we are not worthy or because someone has told us we're not worthy. And we need to come to the Lord to have our spiritual hearts cleansed as well.

Augustine says this, *"Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou has formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee. Lord, teach me to know and understand which of these should be first, to call on Thee, or to praise Thee; and likewise to know Thee, or to call upon Thee."*

They go together. One leads to more of the other. The more we call on God, the more we know God. The more we know God, the more we call on God. The more we call on God, the more we praise God. And the more we praise God, the more we know God. They all go together.

Psalm 63:1-8 says this. *"[1] You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. [2] I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. [3] Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. [4] I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.*

[5] I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. [6] On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. [7] Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. [8] I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

This is what we call for when we call on the name of God.

R.C. Sproul said this. *"It's one thing to be grateful. It's something altogether [different] to show it, to manifest it, to do gratitude. Feeling and doing are not the same thing."*

In this story, all ten felt grateful. All ten were very thankful. But only one did something.

Romans 1:21 says,*"[21] For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."*

Also let me read the verses before and afterwards. ***Romans 1:20***, *"[20] For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."*

And then ***Romans 1:22***. *"[22] Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools… "*

Do you notice the two sins which are there? Two sins of not honoring God as God. But did you see the second one? Nor did they give thanks to God. Do we understand the importance of giving thanks?

And as this man gave thanks, the true gratitude was done in worship. True gratitude is this aspect of worshiping God both individually and corporately. When we thank God, we worship Him. It is much different than if someone gives us something and we just say thank you.

We are thanking that person for the gift. But with God it's different. It's not thanking God for the gift. It is praising God for who He is. And when we praise God for who He is as the giver of all gifts, then we understand the gift much better.

Psalm 103:2 says, *"[2] Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits."* All of them. Everything we have comes from God.

This weekend is a weekend in which we say thanks a lot. And we may list this list of, *"Here are the things that we need to thank God for."* But do we remember? Each morning as you open your eyes, do you realize the gift of sight? Do you say thanks for the gift of breath? How many times have you said, *"Thank You, Lord, that You keep my heartbeat"?* Because to be honest, we can't do a thing about it, right?

For those of us who've dealt with heart issues, we're grateful for that every day. But for most of us, we never think about it. Because our body just does that. And can we, with the psalmist, say, *“Praise the Lord for all my soul and forget not all his benefits?”*

And sometimes, as we learned with the Lord's Prayer, His benefits are these times of testing, going through these hard times. There used to be a phrase called *the school of hard knocks*, right? That's where much of the learning happened.

I once heard somebody say, and I probably shouldn't repeat this, but I once heard somebody say stupidity was taken care of on the playground. Trying to make us learn things through difficult times. And when we're going through a difficult time, can we honestly say, *"Thank you, Lord, that You are teaching me more about who You are"?* And this may be incredibly painful, and I never want to do this again, but at the end of it, I'm incredibly thankful that You loved me enough to teach me how to become more like You.

So I ask this as the praise team comes up. I'll leave you with two questions.

The first one is: Do I love and thank Jesus for what He gives me or for who He is?

I wrestled with that a lot this week, and I wrestled at that on Thanksgiving Day in which we give thanks for all the many gifts that God has given us. But I think that's an important question that we need to ask. Am I really thankful for who God is and that I have a relationship with Him, or am I just thankful for what He gives me, that He takes care of me?

And then the second question is: How do I show thankfulness to Christ?

This man, when He was cleansed, came back yelling, praising the Lord. Does anybody else even know my story of what God has given me, how God has cleansed me, how God has taken care of me? And maybe I don't need to yell it from the mountaintops, but I do need to be telling people, because how many times don't we ask for prayer for something? Do we put as much effort into that as telling people to thank God for that? Do we praise as loud as we plead?

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank You for who You are. And Lord, we thank You that as the God of all that You do give good gifts. Lord, we don't want to overlook that, and we are grateful for them, and we thank You, Lord, for the gifts that You give us. But Lord, help us not to become like these nine where we are just about the gifts and about the cleansing, but Lord, help us to remember that we need to come back to You in praise and in worship, and that it is about being cleansed with wholeness for eternity, not just for the temporary.

And so, Lord, today we bring You our thanks, we bring You our praise, we bring You our gratitude, Lord, for the gift of life, which is far beyond. And Lord, this story was on the way to the cross, and Lord, on the way to the cross, You stopped to heal these people. And Lord, we thank You for going to the cross that we too may be fully healed, and it's only from the precious blood of Jesus and the power of Jesus' name that we can pray this. Amen.