

Ten Lepers, No Wait, Only One

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

King of Glory Lutheran Church

October 12, 2025

Luke 17:11-19

One year a mom decided she would not remind her adult children of their duty to write thank you notes. So the children's grandmother didn't get any thank you for the generous checks that she had written for Christmas. Things changed the next year. The grandmother proudly told her friend, "Each grandchild came over to my house in person to thank me."

"Really? What do you think caused the change? "

"I never signed the checks in the first place."

Saying please and thank you implies, it indicates, it assumes a relationship. Instead of just saying go get me this or fetch me that or put that there, we say, would you please give me this or would you please put that there. Because we don't want to order someone around just because we can. We want to treat someone who is helping us with kindness. We say thank you, in part because they will say 'you are welcome' in return. There is this natural give-and-take that is honorable.

People who don't acknowledge relationship by saying please and thank you, miss out on the building up and the nurturing of what it takes to maintain a relationship.

Last weekend at the Adult class "What does it mean to be Lutheran?", we were talking about law and gospel. The law is like a mirror. When we walk up to it, it shows us our sin. The law shows us where we fall short. Theologically, we could say the law demonstrates our sin and sin equals death. The law keeps us honest with ourselves and God.

Law is pretty obvious: only one man came back to thank Jesus. The Lord said, “Where are the other nine? Weren’t nine healed?”

And in this story, the Gospel is also the surprise. There is a surprise, and that there were 10 men who came to Jesus asking for healing. And one of them was a Samaritan. We remember that Jews and Samaritans were two Ethnic/cultural groups that did not want anything to do with one another. There was a long-standing feud between these two groups. So how is it that one of the 10 is revealed to be a Samaritan?

Perhaps in this middle region, this no man’s land between the border of Galilee and the border of Samaria, the group found one another and were bound together by their common diagnosis. Hardship, suffering, illness, has a way of bonding individuals together; under normal circumstances, those individuals would never choose to associate with one another.

This group of lepers was also in a no man’s land, a middle region as long as they had leprosy. Much has been studied about this skin condition. It was not believed to be a sin to have leprosy. Rather, one was ritually impure all the time. As such, leprosy could not live normal lives, interacting with others. Jesus found them in the village. But they would’ve had to remain far away from family and friends. We know that lepers had to ring bells so as to warn other people of their approach. Therefore, they were a community unto themselves.

We now think that leprosy was a continuous sluffing off of skin; so that it appeared you were a corpse, alive, but decomposing. You were death walking.

If the law shows us our sin and sin is death and leprosy looks like death,... What did Jesus do to death?

He was on his way to Jerusalem to his own death. Where you and I know that death didn't succeed. Our Lord conquered sin and death through His own death and resurrection.

In healing 10 men from leprosy, Jesus brought them back to life! They were not only healed of their skin disease, but they were brought back into community and into relationship! They were healed not only physically but socially and emotionally as well.

And yet it is the one outsider, for people in that day reading the story would say, who didn't deserve God's blessing... That is the one who turned back. The Samaritan fell on his face and worshiped. He praised God for bringing him back from death to life.

A couple of take aways:

Jesus takes note of this man's faith. And he said to have been made whole, to be healed, to be saved. Worship and praise is the response to our healing and salvation.

Secondly, for the Jews who hated the Samaritans... there is a clear message. The ones you want to send back from where they came...the ones we most like to dislike, we better learn to accept them if we want to be part of Jesus' coming Kingdom. This God doesn't reserve blessings or healings or new life for only a few. Our God finds faith and restores life to any and all who come to Him.

In the end, this story is about so much more than just saying thank-you or being grateful. God consistently chooses the ones who the rest of the world thinks are unworthy, to demonstrate what life with God really looks like. A teenage girl, in Luke 2, is chosen to be the mother of God. And she worships! Oh, she sings triumphantly of God, who has turned the world upside down.

Luke 18: a persistent widow, also disconnected from community, keeps knocking and knocking asking for justice. The judge finally grants it.

Also in Luke 18: the Pharisee - the self-righteous religious one praying about how good he is. While the tax collector – the guy working for the wrong party – cries out have mercy on me a sinner.

How easy it is to say thank you when we receive healing and wholeness and salvation. Yet how easy to decry God's grace and salvation when it's for the guy from the wrong team. Thank you, Samaritan, for your example to us! And thank you, God for having grace and mercy for all of us, even we don't have it for others. May we be found as the one who always comes back. Amen!