

## Proper 23, Year C

How many sermons have you heard in your life that are truly memorable? The honest answer is “not many,” and I would not presume to think that this sermon will make your short list.

But as I reflected on this gospel lesson, a sermon I heard years ago came to mind. Not the entire sermon, but I remember a line that a friend of mine once preached as part of a sermon.

He said: “The beginning of faith is a thankful heart.” I think that’s true and I think our gospel lesson today is a good example of this truth.

Ten lepers call out to Jesus, who tells them to go show themselves to the priests. And as they walked, they were healed. It must’ve been remarkable as their sores cleared up with every step.

Then the story becomes provocative, at least to 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews. Only one of the ten returned to thank Jesus, and that one was one of the hated Samaritans, who were considered half-breeds and heretics.

The message is clear. This Kingdom that Jesus proclaims is for those who believe, not for those who are merely part of the tribe, and the beginning of faith is a thankful heart.

Remember that last week Jesus taught the disciples that faith the size of a mustard seed could uproot a tree and hurl it into the sea. For us these lessons are separated by a week but in Luke’s gospel they go together, with today’s lesson serving as an illustration of what it means to exercise a little faith, “Get up and go on your way” Jesus said “Your faith has made you well.”

Gratitude and faith. Intimately linked in this gospel and intimately linked in our lives as well. Gratitude is easy when something good happens to us. Faith is easy when something wonderful happens before your eyes.

But “blessed are those who do not see, and yet believe” Jesus said, because Christ knew that for us virtues like faith and gratitude are spiritual disciplines that require work on our part.

For example, looking back to our gospel lesson, what about those nine who didn’t come back to give thanks? Perhaps one of them was so happy they simply went on in their self-centered way. Perhaps one of them was bitter because of all they had suffered. Perhaps one of them was fearful and didn’t trust what happened and was waiting to see if the sores returned. In other words, there are always reasons that get in

the way of what we are called to do, so spiritual gratitude is a decision before it is a response. And so our call is to practice gratitude as a spiritual discipline.

Part of my own prayer life is a book of meditations that has a little thought for every day. The author is Melanie Beatty, and the meditation for August 1<sup>st</sup> was on gratitude. It reads: "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough. It turns denial into acceptance, a meal into a feast, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude turns negative energy into positive energy, so say thank you until you mean it."

After I read that meditation in August I started an exercise that I now recommend to you. This week, when you are praying, start by completing this line 5 times: Heavenly Father, I am grateful for... and finish the line. Do it every day this week and try not to repeat anything. It can really change your perspective.

Remember how I began, the beginning of faith is a grateful heart, now let me close by adjusting it a little: a grateful heart strengthens our faith. Amen.