

Luke 17:11-19 Priest, Doctor, Savior
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15
October 12, 2025

As we enter into the final season of the year, it is common to consider the things associated with gratitude. At the end of another year's living, thanksgiving takes center stage, a recognition of God's continued care, set in the context of the harvest, another year of nature's life sustaining produce.

In most civilizations, there has been a formal celebration of some kind, fall festivals, some of the happiest and most beloved of all the year; Octoberfest, Tabernacles, Halloween, Thanksgiving.

For most of human history, the rhythms of life have been associated with nature; planting and harvesting, the times in-between, winter and summer. In more recent times the, "rhythm of the seasons," is less decisive because technology allows people access to life's necessities on a daily basis. We go to the store for the things we need, or we make online purchases that are delivered to our doorsteps any day of the year.

But we are still aware of our vulnerability; for that which we need to sustain us is continually present not only because nature is working, but also because it comes to us through the work of countless other people involved in systems and processes of which most of the time we are unaware. Gratitude is not seasonal, nor is the need for it.

On this second Sunday of October we begin to dabble in the biblical stories that can be said to bring us reminders of the over-arching human need for thankfulness, without which one can not be healthy, grounded in a right relation to God.

There are two stories up for grabs today. One is from the Old Testament, the other from the New. They are drawn together by the disease of leprosy. In 2nd Kings we find the story of Naaman the Leper. By way of introduction we are told that Naaman was a great leader in the Aramean army, which situates the story in the middle of the divided monarchy, before the rise of the Assyrians who would threaten Israel and eventually conquer them.

"But he had leprosy." Leprosy, as is commonly known, could refer to a variety of skin diseases ranging from mild but contagious conditions up to a deadly disease that stole away any semblance of a meaningful life. It always set people outside their communities. It involved a quarantine existence in which there was little hope of healing or rescue.

A young Israelite slave girl in the service of Naaman's wife suggested that he consult the prophet in Israel, which turned out to be Elisha, who came to the rescue. The story is familiar from this point on. Elisha asked Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times.

Initially Naaman thought this was beneath his status, after all there were better rivers at home. He had

nothing to lose, and he was cured. By way of payment, Elisha refused to take anything from him. By way of thanks, Naaman promised, except in the pursuit of his duties, to offer sacrifices only to Yahweh.

The second account is, of course, from the gospel of Luke and is the feature story of the day, about the ten lepers that Jesus healed, and the one who returned to offer gratitude. It is familiar enough. As Jesus made his way to Jerusalem he traveled along the state line, if you will, between Galilee and Samaria.

He went into a village and ran into ten men who had leprosy, and from a distance they cried out for mercy. He told them to go and show themselves to the priests, who had the authority to declare that they were clean, thus making it possible for them to be re-integrated into their community. As they went, they were healed.

One of them returned to offer thanks. The text is quick to point out that he was a Samaritan. The distinction between being cleansed and healed is as follows; one restores a person to their family and co-workers and friends, and to their church, while the other involves a healthiness of mind and body.

Furthermore, there is the distinction between those who went their way to the priests and then back to their lives, and the one who returned with gratitude on his sleeve and in his heart. There is no reason to believe that the other nine are bad people, or even that they are not thankful, but not in a way that caused

them to be present to what was happening enough to acknowledge Jesus.

The implication of the story is that they were missing something; that there is a kind of wellness that comes with gratitude and *maybe* in no other way. What is the nature of this wellness?

There is much variety in the gospel story, the biblical story, that combines to emphasize the multifacetedness of both God's nature, and human nature. The story leads us to think of human nature for the moment, because the exhortation to be thankful is pervasive throughout scripture. People do not do well when they are not thankful. People do not do well when, among other things:

They are isolated - like the ten lepers, who had only each other for community. And yet we find a similar problem in our time, associated with modern technology. For all its advantages, it has tended to increase and not diminish isolation as a facet of life, even those parts of it that were conceived and created and believed to enhance togetherness. How many times have we heard that social media was going to bring people together in ways never before conceived. It has come with some unintended and unforeseen results.

They are rejected - Rejection hurts, it doesn't matter if it is justified. It does not matter if it is deserved, or if it is mutual. Sometimes an accumulated sense of rejection stemming from experiences over time cause

people to protect themselves by withholding trust, withdrawing into a cocoon that isolates them further.

They are unforgiven/unforgiving - Part of the theological and biblical insistence upon the supremacy of grace stems from the reality that restoration is impossible without it. Forgiveness is the only possibility that can overcome the breach. In Christ, the breach has been overcome. We are not alone, we are accepted. We have been forgiven.

And people do not do well, when they are ungrateful - Even when feelings are mixed, when there is gratitude about some aspects of life, but not about others, ingratitude has a sneaky way of wrapping its fingers around our throats and choking the life out of us, unless it is let go, unless its grip is broken.

Interestingly, there are several words used which give names to the healthy life envisioned in the message of Jesus. Three distinct terms appear in the telling of this story.

There is cleansing. It has to do with the spiritual state of being acceptable for worship; a state which allows a person to take part in the religious life of the people, and thus in the life of the community at large. The word is *katharismos*, from which we derive the English word, *catharsis*, an emptying of the unhealthy feelings and emotions that result from life's hardships. The declaration of cleanness was a function of the priest.

There is healing, as the result of the care of a doctor. The word is *iatro*. If you listen you can hear it in the modern words like *psychiatry*, *pediatric*, or *geriatric*, which refer to medical subdivisions and the specialists who work in them. The noun refers to a physician. There is an associated verb meaning, "to heal."

And there is a wholeness associated with a well integrated healthy life. The word is *sozo*. This one can be heard in the modern word that is a female name, *Zoe*, or is a part of the word, *Zoo*, or *zoology*, which refers to, "life," and is often the word translated as, "salvation."

There are ways to be clean and healthy; no leprosy, no illness, no present crisis or pathology, no reason to go to the priest or the doctor, but wholeness is a different kind of gift . . . it is a grace accepted . . . one of the primary features of that acceptance is gratitude.

All three ideas show up in this brief account: Jesus sent them to the *priests* to be declared clean. Along the way they were healed, as if by a *doctor*. The one who came back to give thanks was told, "your faith has saved you, made you whole, a gift from a *savior*, the giver of life and health in the present realm, and in the age to come.

Let us be sure to return to give thanks.

John 3:1-21

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

John 7:45-52

45 Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”

46 “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied.

47 “You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted. 48 “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”

50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51 “Does

our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?”

52 They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

How can a man enter gain into his mother’s womb?
How can this be?

The distinction between the earthly and heavenly, temporal and eternal, material and spiritual realms is emphasized in John, comically, and it is a little funny, Nicodemus asks the silly question, which troubles us all at some point.

Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?

John 19:38-42

38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.[e] 40 Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of

Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

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