

Luke 17:11-19

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[0 : 0 0] Next Sunday morning, we will be celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Now, in the past, the communion season, as the weekend has traditionally been called, certainly in our tradition, included a Monday evening service, which was known as the Thanksgiving service. And it wasn't so long ago that we had that service here in Bon Accord. And there are still some congregations that retain the Monday evening service, but there are many like ourselves who no longer have that Monday evening Thanksgiving service. I wonder, is that evidence that we are not thankful? Well, I hope that that isn't the case at all. The curious thing, as we pondered on this Thanksgiving service, the curious thing is that the communion service itself, and very particularly that the sacrament that we celebrate, is itself an act of thanksgiving. You'll know that in some traditions. What we call the Lord's Supper or communion is known as the Eucharist. And that name is in reference to what Jesus did as He instituted the sacrament with His disciples in the upper room. We have a record of that in Luke's Gospel in chapter 22. And there we read that Jesus, after taking the cup, He gave thanks. And then a little further forward we read, He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it. And the Greek verb translated on these two occasions, gave thanks, is Eucharisto or Eucharisto, hence Eucharist or meal of thanksgiving.

Again, a curious detail for those of you who are interested in curious facts is that there are 37 occurrences of that verb, to give thanks, Eucharisto, in the New Testament. And in 36 of the 37 occurrences, the reference is explicitly to giving thanks to God. Now, obviously, that verb, to give thanks, in English. In English, we would use it in many directions, to thank God, to thank others. But that particular verb, as I say, in all of its occurrences, in 36 of the 37 occurrences, explicitly, it is thanks directed to God. And the 37th occurrence is the one that we have in the passage that we've read, where thanks are directed to Jesus. Now, that in itself is quite interesting.

And I wonder if Luke deliberately employed this word, and in doing so, gave an indication of his own convictions concerning the identity of Jesus. Well, that's an interesting matter to ponder on. But it's not our concern this evening. Our concern this evening is to give some thought to the matter of God-pleasing gratitude, and to do so with a view to our participation next Sunday morning in a meal of thanksgiving instituted by Jesus. We're going to gather and participate in a meal of thanksgiving.

So, it seems that essential to participating rightly is that we would gather with a sense of gratitude. How can you participate in a meal of thanksgiving if you're not thankful, if you're not grateful, if you're not conscious of the reasons that you have to be grateful? So, we want to think a little bit about that, this matter of gratitude, and very particularly what we could call God-pleasing gratitude. And we're going to do so with the help of the passage that we've read, this incident that is recorded for us of Jesus healing these ten men who suffered from leprosy, and how one of them, the Samaritan, returned to give thanks to Jesus. The manner in which we're going to order our thoughts this evening is by thinking of these different aspects of gratitude. First of all, we're going to think a little bit about the cause of gratitude. Why is it that this man, and as we'll see, perhaps we can also include the others, why is it that they were grateful to Jesus? The cause of gratitude.

[4 : 53] That's the first thing we're going to think about. But then we're also going to think a little bit about the identity of the grateful. Who are they who are grateful? We might immediately come to a conclusion that there's one man who we would identify as the grateful one, and that's certainly true, but we might be of a mind to extend that somewhat. Well, we'll think about that a little bit.

So, the cause of gratitude, the identity of the grateful, then also the features of God-pleasing gratitude, certainly as we find them in the example, in this case, of this one man who returned to thank Jesus' features of God-pleasing gratitude. And then finally, we'll find in the passage what we're calling the results of God-pleasing gratitude. What flows from, what is the outcome of, if you wish, God-pleasing gratitude? Let's think, first of all, then, about the cause of gratitude. And here there are three aspects that we want to note. We want to note, first of all, the sorry condition of the men that Jesus healed, their sorry condition. We want to notice their cry for help, and we want to notice their experience of healing and see how all of these come together in giving them cause for gratitude.

What can we say of their condition? Well, it's very much the case that we can't begin to properly appreciate the cause of the leper's gratitude without appreciating the extent of their sorry condition.

There was no more miserable fate than to be a leper. It was a horrible disease in terms of the physical consequences of it. But we know, not only from this passage, but from the material that helps us in this regard across the New Testament, and particularly the Gospels, we know that it goes beyond the physical. The physical itself was bad enough. Leprosy led to both social and spiritual banishment for those who were suffering from it. Leprosy was a symbol of sin. And not just in the popular mindset. It's not just one of these things that people who lived then came to that view. No, this was something that God Himself had indicated, that leprosy served as a visual aid, really a very somber, even morbid, we might say, a visual aid concerning sin. It illustrated in its outward expression the effects of sin on the soul. And as such, lepers were not only viewed as sick, but as sinners. Now, that's not to say that they were any more sinners than those who didn't suffer from the condition. But that is certainly how they were viewed. So, their condition really was a desperately sad and sorry one. It is intriguing when we look at the passage before us that this condition that they suffered from, these ten men who suffered from leprosy, one effect of it, one result of it, in their experience, was that it broke down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, between Jews and

Samaritans particularly. And we know how difficult was that relationship and how there wasn't a mixing of Jews and Samaritans. And yet, in their disgrace and their misery, here among this group, there were those who were Jews, and there was also certainly at least one Samaritan together as a result of their leprosy. And I think that really says quite a lot about their identity and what had become of their identity. They were no longer, in many ways, Jews or Gentiles. They were just lepers. That's what they were. They were lepers. And all other aspects of their identity were subsumed under this one big and horrendous reality that that's what they were. They were lepers. So, one leper, another leper, a Jewish leper, a Samaritan leper. Well, at the end of the day, the big truth, the solemn and sad truth about these men is this one reality. They were lepers. This was their very sorry condition that they found themselves in.

[9 : 43] And as a result of that, they do seek help. We've read the passage. They cry out for help. These men are conscious of their miserable condition and of their great need. And so, they call out for mercy.

We read that as Jesus was going into a village, there in verse 12, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us, have mercy on us. The very fact that they call out for mercy to Jesus suggests that they were privy to reports of His healing power. They had heard of this man, Jesus, who could heal the sick. And so, they wondered whether perhaps, perhaps He might heal them. Did they believe that they would be healed when they cried out in the way that they did? Well, I don't know. But certainly, they had nothing to lose in calling out for mercy. And so, they call out for mercy, demonstrating some measure of faith that this man, of whom they had heard, He might be able to help them. So, this sorry condition in which they found themselves in leads to this cry for help. And of course, it then leads, as we've read, to their experience of being healed. And the manner of their healing is, in itself, noteworthy.

Jesus does not do what He had done and ordinarily would do. He doesn't simply heal them, declare them healed there, and then He doesn't touch them and heal them. Rather, He sends them to the priests.

We can read there in verse 14 what Jesus does. When He saw them, He said, go, show yourselves to the priests. I wonder what they thought when they first heard these words.

You know, they've asked for mercy, implicit. They're asking for Jesus to heal them, and then He sends them to the priests. What did they make of this instruction that Jesus gave them?

[11 : 52] Were they, in some measure, disappointed, maybe a little confused? They do what He tells them. And of course, there is a context to this, that if a leper was healed, then it was necessary for the leper to go to the priest for it to be established that he had indeed been healed, and it to be official, as it were. So, there is a, in a sense, there's a reason for it, but of course, they haven't been healed yet. So, it would have been a very foolish thing to go to the priest if you still were suffering from leprosy. And yet, this is what Jesus instructs them to do. And what happens? Well, we read in the passage what happens. And as they went, they were cleansed. As they went, as the lepers, all ten of them, as they obey the instruction given to them by Jesus, as they go, in their obeying, they are healed.

Here again, it's interesting, the word that is used by Luke, we're talking about them being healed, but the actual word that is used is the word cleansed. And that again ties in with what we were saying a few moments ago about the nature of leprosy, how it was understood as being more than a physical condition. In other occasions, when sick were healed, then that is the word that would be used. They were healed, but for leprosy, the word employed is cleansed. Of course, they were healed, but the word that is chosen is cleansed, which again, as I say, ties in with what we were commenting a few moments ago. As they obeyed, so it happened. Can you imagine how they must have felt as they're making their way to the priest, taking perhaps the first few tentative steps, and as they go, they become conscious that something is happening, and they look at their hands, and they look at their body, and they look at each other, and they have this realization that they have been healed, that they've been cleansed. It's almost impossible for us to even conceive of the level of excitement that that must have generated in this group of men. And all of these things come together to explain to us or present to us the cause of their gratitude. The reason for gratitude is grounded in the condition that they suffered. It's grounded in their recognition of that condition and of their cry for help, and of course, in the response of Jesus and the healing that they enjoy. When we think of these elements and we apply them to ourselves, these same elements apply for us in our gratitude to God,

God. And that is true always, but thinking particularly of how we will gather as God's people at a meal of thanksgiving a week today, we need to ponder on these aspects of the cause that we have for gratitude. We have to ponder on our sorry and miserable condition as sinners. We need to understand more fully the gravity of our condition as sinners. The consequences fought us of unforgiven sin. Where would we be as sinners were it not for God's grace? Were it not for His forgiveness? Were it not for His cleansing in our lives? Where would we be as we sit and participate in a thanksgiving meal? May we do so very conscious of how grave our condition as sinners? Our gratitude will be, the quality of it, the depth of it will be a function of the extent to which we appreciate the gravity of our state as sinners. But also, it will be a function of the extent to which we have cried to God for mercy, the extent to which, having realized the seriousness of our condition, we've asked for help and we've received help like these men cried out for mercy and received mercy. In that measure, we will be grateful, or certainly in that measure, or in the absence of these things, we certainly will not be grateful. So, the cause of gratitude. But then the identity of the grateful, and it's important to move on to this because you might be thinking, well, you're saying that all of these things would be cause for gratitude, but there's a problem. Of the ten, all were not grateful. Of course, that also is a sad reflection on the human condition that even when we receive great help from God, even when we are the objects of deep and amazing love, that doesn't guarantee that our response will be of gratitude. But nonetheless, let's move on to think about those who were grateful, the identity of the grateful. How many were grateful? Well, let me suggest, and you may come to a different view, and that's fine.

The point that I'm going to make now is not one that we can state definitively, but let me suggest that all ten men were grateful. I don't think that's a particularly controversial proposal. They had all been suffering from this terrible disease. They'd all been cleansed, healed from this disease. It seems inconceivable that any of them would have been anything other than grateful in some measure, grateful for this miraculous experience of healing, grateful too for the one through whom this healing had been secured. The issue is not if they were grateful, but the nature of their gratitude and the expression of their gratitude. You see, it is possible, and this is a solemn thing for us to think about, it's possible to be grateful to God for help extended, but for that gratitude not to be God-pleasing. For the nature of that gratitude not to be as God would have us be grateful and show and express our gratitude. But what about the one who very clearly demonstrates his gratitude? Indeed,

I would say demonstrates God-pleasing gratitude. What do we know of him? Well, we're told that he was a Samaritan. Luke himself editorially gives us that information, but Jesus himself, in the words that he expresses, recognizes that this man was a foreigner, he was a Samaritan. I wonder if that reality, I don't know if he was the only of the ten, maybe was he the only Samaritan? Well, we don't know. But I wonder if that reality of the fact that he was a Samaritan, I wonder if that might have generated in this man a greater sense of his own unworthiness, and so a deeper and more heartfelt gratitude that Jesus would have been prepared to heal even one such as he was. But what of the nine who failed to be grateful as they ought to have been? If they were, unlike the one who did return, if they were Jews, why is it?

[19:37] Why does Jesus explicitly identify this distinction? Why is it? What is going on here? Might it be that the fault, the problem with the other nine is one of presumption, of imagining that they had some kind of right to God's help. Now, there's no doubt that this incident is recorded.

It's a historical incident. It really happened. There were these ten lepers. They were healed, one returned. But the fact that it's recorded and we find it in Scripture also serves a purpose.

It's intended as a rebuke to the Jews who were guilty of proud presumption concerning the blessings of God. As a people, they were guilty of that proud presumption. Of course, there were the faithful remnant who were not guilty of that. But generally and certainly the religious establishment was guilty of this proud presumption. We are God's chosen people. We are special. God loves us beyond any love that he has for others. Indeed, he only loves us. We are God's people. And rather than that being a cause of gratitude, it was a cause of pride and presumption. And of course, the Jewish people, the people of Israel were a deeply privileged people. That is true. We know that to be true. We can see how Paul summarizes it in very vivid terms. In his letter to the Romans in chapter 9 and in verse 4 and 5, he describes the privileges of which the people of Israel were the objects. The people of Israel, theirs is the adoption of sons. Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs. And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen. So, Paul recognizes in so many ways the people of Israel, the people of God were a privileged people. And that ought to have resulted in humble gratitude, but so often it didn't result in humble gratitude. It resulted in proud presumption. And I wonder if these lepers somehow illustrate that problem. They were real people and have to take responsibility, each of them for their actions, but they do illustrate this bigger problem. Privilege had, for many, bred presumption. Well, what about us? Is it possible for us, even on Sunday, to gather at the Lord's table to participate in this meal of thanksgiving, maybe for many of us, something we have done on countless occasions? And is there a danger that we can do so without that God-pleasing gratitude, and rather guilty even of proud presumption? Of course, we will gather. That's where we belong.

God is our God. He's forgiven us. He saved us. And so, we gather at His table, and rightly so. But how important for us to be careful that the blessings that we enjoy ought not to be a cause for presumption, but rather a cause for humble gratitude, that God would spare us from gathering at His table with hearts devoid of heartfelt gratitude. Let's move on and quickly consider and notice some of the features of God-pleasing gratitude as we find them illustrated in the passage, and particularly by the Samaritan. Let me mention four features. You might find others as you read through the passage, but let me just identify four features of God-pleasing gratitude. The first thing that we can say is that it is directed very explicitly and very deliberately to God.

God-pleasing gratitude is directed to God as the giver. Notice what is said of this man when he turns back.

[24 : 08] There in verse 15, we read, One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back. And what is he doing? Even before he throws himself down at the feet of Jesus, what is he doing? Praising God in a loud voice. Praising God in a loud voice.

His gratitude is directed to God. We don't know to what extent or in what measure. Indeed, at this point, if in any measure he had an understanding of the identity of Jesus. But he is praising God. He certainly sees Jesus as one through whom God has worked on his behalf. And so he is praising God. He is directing his gratitude to God. And it's something that we must continually do. Direct our thanks to the one who grants us so much and so much blessing. It's directed gratitude, but also it's immediate.

That's maybe the most striking feature of the incident. The Samaritan on realizing the miracle that he was the object of immediately turned around. And I don't know if we could call it justified disobedience. I don't know if that's fair. You know, he had been told to go to the priest, and he's heading to the priest. But without any indication that he should do otherwise, he turns back and heads to Jesus.

It would be a harsh man who criticized him for that. But he turns back immediately and makes his way, praising God to Jesus. And as we read, throws himself at Jesus' feet. He doesn't dilly-dally. He doesn't delay. He doesn't wait for a more fitting moment or in a more appropriate time. No, now is the time. As he appreciates what he has received from God through Jesus, so immediately he expresses his gratitude to God and indeed to Jesus. And his gratitude also another feature is that it is very public in its demonstration. As I was thinking about this public demonstration of gratitude, indeed public demonstration of affection as he throws himself at the feet of Jesus. The thought that came to mind was when we were on holiday a couple of weeks ago in Dubai, in some of the public buildings and the shopping malls and others. There's signs that indicate etiquette that should be followed within these public spaces. And there's a few rules that there are, and one of them is that the clients, the customers, should abstain from public displays of affection. Well, obviously that's a cultural matter in that particular country. Well, I don't know how this man would have got on, because what we have here is a very public display of gratitude and of affection to the one who had healed him. Very publicly, very vocally, very dramatically, very visibly, this man casts himself at the feet of

Jesus. Now, our circumstances are different as we ponder on and as we come to realize and appreciate what God has done for us. But we too are called to publicly declare our loyalty and gratitude to Jesus.

[27 : 36] It's not just a private matter. No, this is something that we are called to display. Our loyalty to Jesus, our gratitude to Jesus, is a matter that should be on the public record and should be visible to others.

Then another feature that I find here of his gratitude is that it is a continuing gratitude. It's not just a one-off dramatic moment. This description that we have of the leper throwing himself at Jesus' feet, I think we can understand it, we ought to understand it, as more than a spontaneous or only a spontaneous expression of gratitude. It is a visible demonstration of his newfound devotion to Jesus.

And this devotion, we can be sure, would evidence itself in continuing service to Jesus. What about us as we give thought to where we stand in the matter of God-pleasing gratitude, especially as we look forward to participating in a Thanksgiving meal? We would all do well to examine ourselves and ask if we are directing our gratitude to God, if we are quick to express our thanks, if we are willing to publicly give expression to our loyalty and gratitude to Jesus.

And what of our devotion? Is it a devotion that perseveres and matures and deepens? Features of God-pleasing gratitude. But then finally, and we close with this, the result or outcome of God-pleasing gratitude. What does Jesus say to the Samaritan leper? Well, in verse 19, we find the words that Jesus directs to him.

And then he said to him, rise and go, your faith has made you well. Or your faith has made you whole. This is another way in which the words that Jesus uses could be translated. Your faith has made you well.

[29 : 37] Your faith has made you whole. Indeed, it would be a legitimate translation to say your faith has saved you. Is Jesus referring only to being healed of his leprosy? Well, clearly he is referring to his being healed of his leprosy, but not only of his leprosy. The language that he uses, your faith has made you whole, points to a healing of body and soul. Indeed, the language that has already been used also points in that direction. The rest enjoyed physical healing. The other nine, they were healed of their leprosy.

But this man, as a result of his God-pleasing gratitude, or certainly in parallel with his God-pleasing gratitude, enjoys physical and spiritual healing. This is what comes. This is the experience of those who are grateful to God as they ought to be. Let me just finish with a quote from one commentator who is reflecting on this conclusion to the matter, and these words of Jesus directed to the man who has been healed. Your faith has made you well or has made you whole. And I'll just read what the man says. He who has received only blessings from his hand and does not come close to him in humble but heartfelt gratitude will always forgo what is the highest and most glorious in life.

But he who, on receiving gifts out of his hand, out of God's hand, turns to the giver himself in real gratitude will partake of fullness of life and happiness. There is nothing that can bind one more closely to him than sincere gratitude. Especially those closing words of the man who is commenting on this part of the passage, there is nothing that can bind one more closely to him, bind us more closely to the Lord than sincere gratitude. Well, may that be true of us. May we be ever grateful believers as we live our lives, as we're conscious of God's generous provision for us, and then especially as we consider gathering around to participate in a thanksgiving meal. May we do so as those who have discovered that there is nothing that binds us more to our Savior than our sincere gratitude to him for all that he has done and continues to do for us. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Word. We thank you for your Son, Jesus. We thank you for the manner in which he made this man whole. We thank you that Jesus remains in the business of making men and women whole. We thank you that his saving work is one that involves all of who we are, every aspect of our being. We thank you for that. We thank you that there is nothing left undone, nothing that needs to be done that is not dealt with by your salvation, secured for us by the work of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would help us to be grateful believers. We confess that we can so easily be guilty of presumption. It may not be crass, proud presumption, as we see in some of the religious leaders in Jesus' day, but nonetheless, guilty of presumption, guilty of taking for granted that which we have and continue to receive, of being somewhat blasé about all our privileges as believers. Forgive us for that and help us to be grateful. Help us that our gratitude would be God-pleasing gratitude, that it would be pleasing to you, and all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.