

Sunday 12th February 2023

Glynde Lutheran Church

Message on Luke 17:11 – 19

Theme: “Samaritan Returns Thanks”

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This story of Jesus and the ten lepers is a classic text that is used for Thanksgiving services in America every November. Pastors encourage their people to be like that one leper, that one Samaritan, who came back to say thank you to Jesus. Even psychology and science tell us that our lives are better, and it's good for our society, when we are thankful for what we have received. To recognise all we have, to be thankful, certainly is a good thing.

But as we look closer again at this text, we find that God does what God always does with a text. He provides something new for us to discover. The attitude of being thankful, being grateful, here's how to live your life, here's what you need to do. This is all the **law**.

The law is the fancy way of saying: this is the part of the Bible that tells you to “Be better, do better.”

All throughout scripture there are passages where God tells us, “You need to *do* this, to *be* this. To be the better Christian, *this* is how you ought to live.” In theology we call this, **the law**. What the law always does isn't to tell us how we're going to be better. The law always shows us how we *fail* at doing those things!

God doesn't put those laws in there because he thinks we can achieve them! He knows we won't!

The idea of the law - of these imperatives – “do this, do that, be better” - are all to drive us to him, to Christ. Because we realise we *can't* live up to that, and we struggle with that.

So realising this, we have to dig deeper into this text to find where the gospel is. Where is the good news for us? Because gratitude is not *innate*! It's not *natural* for us to do. We struggle with it right from very childhood. We have to tell our kids how to be thankful. Right, parents? Exactly! What you're doing parents, teaching your kids how to be thankful, is something Pastor Nick remembers from his mission trip days to Mexico with his mother. Parents have a natural ability to get their kids to say thank you. I think all parents automatically know how to do this and language knows no barrier!

So in Spanish you say *Gracias* for 'thank you' and 'you're welcome' is *De nada*. Nick's mum was helping one of the kids there and gave him something, and he of course didn't say anything. Nick's mum said kindly, *De nada* and the kid said reluctantly, *Gracias*. He knew what he was *supposed* to say, and yet he didn't. Somehow parents know they should teach kids to be thankful, because it's not natural for us to do it.

Sometimes when we get that spirit of gratitude it's a fleeting moment - it's something that comes and eventually fades away.

You might be so thankful for a new house to live in, and all the perks and all the exciting things, and you really realise how God has helped you, and cared for you. But soon enough you get pretty comfortable in that house, and you start seeing all the cracks, and all the things that you don't like about it. Then you go, 'I have to do this, and fix that. Now God, what have you put upon me?'

We so easily move from gratitude to *not* happy, *not* thankful.

And so, gratitude is something that we really struggle with and I think even when people *do* say thank you for things, it's not always authentic.

Unfortunately, so often that's what we teach our kids when we *force* them to say thank you for things. We're teaching them to be thankful even when they're not – even when you don't really mean it! It's not always a good thing! I don't know that there's a better option there. I'm still trying to figure that out, as many parents are. Maybe we can set an example of remembering to thank our family members, and do it when the kids are listening.

When we say thank you, rarely are we *truly* thankful. We're just keeping with the social norms, writing the thank you notes because we know we should. How many have spent hours writing thank you notes for gifts they received, and as a kid your hand hurt and you weren't thankful at all, were you? You just had to get through those notes because mum or dad was telling you to!

So if we *fail to do better and be better*, what story of gospel is this for us?

If we're always like those nine lepers who are not returning thanks? Who are *not* giving back and being thankful for what they've been given, namely the great healing. These were the *outcasts*, these people weren't allowed to go home.

And yet they weren't thankful enough to return back to the source of their healing – to Jesus.

What does it say for us?

One thing that we can take comfort in, as we read this, is that while one returned and the nine didn't, ***all were healed***.

Jesus didn't take back the healing.

It wasn't like, 'Oh, the nine didn't come back, so I'm taking away my healing.'

That's something *we* would do, isn't it? If we gave out something and we didn't get a thank you back, we would love to do a take-back, wouldn't we? This happens in work in different areas. If somebody doesn't meet their performance level, their KPIs are missed, doesn't hit the things they're

supposed to do, we take back that bonus. We take things away from them. We would do that. We would take back that healing when we don't get the thank you we feel we deserve – the appreciation that should be there.

But not Jesus.

Jesus heals them;

heals you; heals me.

Regardless of whether we're thankful or not!

Let that sink in for a second!

Because we know we *don't* always live the right life, the perfect life, the good Christian life. So often we attach God's love to that and think, 'If I'm not doing the right thing, if I'm not coming to church enough, if I'm not praying enough or reading the Bible, then God must not love me as much as he could if I did what I was *supposed* to do!'

That's not what this story shows us.

Jesus' love is unconditional!

It doesn't matter that those nine didn't come back. He still loves them and heals them and wants them to return home to their families, to live life to its fullest again!

That's the radical, amazing love of Jesus – one that knows no bounds.

One that we just can't possibly fathom.

His healing is for everyone – especially the outcast, the outsider, the ones who don't deserve it, like... well, like me and you.

Yet he loves us! Jesus doesn't take away the healing, because Jesus' love is for everyone.

But the one who *did* return also teaches us something in that great interaction that he has with Jesus. Because it's not about being more grateful.

It's about what that one leper, the Samaritan, recognised in that healing. Let me remind you: a Samaritan was an outcast of outcasts, wasn't he? He was *not* the religious one. He was *not* the faithful one. He was mixed in with a bunch of Jews and ones who *were* following the law, and doing what was right. But a Samaritan is an outsider.

A Samaritan is like someone who would walk into this church, and everyone would immediately feel uncomfortable!

"What are *they* doing here?"

"How could they possibly think *they* could come in and sit with us?"

That's the emotion that the Samaritan would have created in the people of Jesus' day.

Yet the Samaritan was healed, who had no rights to interact with Jesus. All he knew was that Jesus was a healer. He said "*Have mercy on us*". That's what they all cried out. And yet, he returned with thanks! I think because he was most keenly aware of his brokenness, of his status as an outsider, as an unwanted person.

I think there are those in our culture today. We see this as new believers come to faith. They are most keenly aware that they were not a part of the church, not a part of Christ's love, that they were broken and sinful. But when they come to faith and they realise the grace and love of God, they are full of energy, full of life, full of joy! Have you seen this in a new believer? It is amazing, because what once was lost, is now found. They experience that, and it is radiant.

It's also challenging for us who've grown up in the church – for whom faith has always been the steady backbeat of our whole lives – it's challenging to understand that, because we've just never been connected to that

brokenness like they have, to that lostness like the Prodigal Son. Again, remember we who are faithful are so much like that elder son in the Prodigal Son story.

But this Samaritan *knew* his brokenness, *knew* his status as an outcast. When he received the love and healing power of Jesus Christ, it produced fruits of faith,

and one of those fruits of faith was thankfulness, was gratitude.

Now back at the beginning I said I don't think gratitude or thankfulness is something that's *natural* or *innate* for us. To me, thankfulness or gratitude is something that comes from *outside* of us. It is *supernatural*.

It comes only from the faith we receive in Christ.

And so it's only natural that when we're connected with our brokenness, our lostness, when we realise we don't have perfection, when we understand the law that tells us, 'You're not enough', *then* we understand the power of baptism and faith that we receive.

Out of that faith are produced *fruits* of faith, like gratitude, like thanksgiving.

When you understand the **source** of your gratitude and thankfulness doesn't come from *your* ability, but from the faith God has given you. It changes *how* you give thanks and **why** you give thanks.

You're not just doing it as a social norm. You're not just doing it because your mum told you so!

You're doing it, because you know where you were, and you know what God has done for you.

So gratitude comes out of the brokenness of knowing our faults and our lostness, and it is produced by faith, by Christ's death, by his salvation for us, given to us freely. That produces *fruits* of faith: gratitude, thanksgiving.

So, in a roundabout way, yes, this story is still about gratitude and thanksgiving, but it's not about *us* doing it. It's about us settling into the faith that God has given us, to produce that thankfulness in us.

And so, connect and remember that you are broken.

You don't do what you should all the time.

But God's grace and love is for you.

You experience it on a regular basis and because of that, **you can be thankful and live a life of gratitude.** Amen.