



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



Sunday 9 October 2022

READINGS

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7; Psalm 66: 1-12; 2 Tim 2: 8-15; Luke 17: 11-19

Embracing the attitude of gratitude

Dr Brené Brown, famous author and researcher, particularly researching on vulnerability, wrote a book titled *The Gifts of Imperfection: Letting Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to be and Embrace Who You Are*. In it, she offers some guidelines on how to live a wholehearted life.

One of the findings that emerged from her research was that the people who described themselves as joyful all had one thing in common: an active practice of gratitude. Brené argues that while we expect to find that joyful people were grateful for what they had in their lives, her findings indicated that it's in fact gratitude that comes first. She goes on to say that simply maintaining an attitude of gratitude is not enough – we have to practice gratitude so that it translates into a behaviour! Saying thank you! Active practice of gratitude.

In this week's lectionary readings we encounter Naaman in the 2nd Book Kings. Naaman is a high-ranking Syrian military leader, he was plagued by a skin condition - leprosy. His wife's servant-girl helped to pave the way for his healing, but Naaman had a hard time letting go of the idea that he needed to do more than just follow the Prophet Elisha's simple instructions to go and wash 7 times in the River Jordan. He was offended, and it took more of his servants to persuade him to listen to the prophet Elisha as demonstrated in the following words:

"Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

Naaman listened, followed the prophet's instructions and received the promised healing. 5:15c Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

In our Gospel passage we encounter 10 men also assailed by leprosy, - a severe chronic skin disease which carried such stigma that the sufferers were pronounced outcasts and "unclean" in the eyes of society and therefore, these were shunned from society and often disowned by their ashamed relatives. In this Gospel passage the 10 men seek healing, and Jesus gives it by sending them off to go and present themselves to the priest in the Temple. They hurry to do what lepers are supposed to do when they're healed: show themselves to the priest, as Jesus instructed them, and get the priest to give them a stamp of

approval that they're safe to re-enter society. But you know, some of our worst experiences provide fertile ground for our best opportunities. Only one of them, a despised Samaritan, returns to give thanks.

The nine lepers were obediently doing what Jesus told them to do and what they know the Law required of them. They were being good, observant, faithful Jews. Jesus wonders where they are, but we know, and we assume he knows, that they're at the Temple, getting their certificates so they can go back to their lives, the sooner the better.

This outsider, this Samaritan, this "them," may be so overcome with gratitude and joy that he turns back to Jesus, but on the other hand, the Temple isn't a place he'd be welcome even if he is cured of his leprosy. He was an outsider!

There's no cure for being a Samaritan, a well-known outsider. You cannot be rehabilitated back into community if you were a Samaritan. Interesting, that Jesus often uses examples of such shunned, despised outcasts to teach something about the nature of God. Of all of them, this one Samaritan has plenty of time to come back and say thank you to Jesus.

I imagine that the others were too busy enjoying their new-found status in society - getting back into their proper societal position. And who could blame them? After all, they were just following Jesus' instructions, right? Jesus asks what appears to be an unfair question: "Where are the other nine?" It might not seem like a fair question since Jesus himself had told them to go and show themselves to the priest. All the lepers received physical healing, but the Samaritan also received spiritual healing – he found wholeness: "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Other translations say "your faith has made you whole. This is what the other nine missed.

Gratitude and thanksgiving are critical to our lives as faithful disciples. Often we take these for granted because of our hectic and overcommitted lives. So much is constantly being given to us that it is easy to forget what really matters. This world is full of blessing and challenges. But given that we live in a culture filled with blame and accusation and almost empty of thanksgiving, maybe on this day, and remembering the tenth leper, we can go out and be instruments of blessing and bearers of powerful words of gratitude. Let us strive each day, amidst all the hopelessness and the stress, to find a moment to say: "Today I am grateful for....."

The Russian novelist, Feodor Dostoevsky. As a young intellectual in Petersburg, was arrested and sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. He went from comfort to the most terrible suffering. Life as a convict was so oppressive that he considered giving up in despair. A ten-year-old young girl helped him change his thinking. She had seen Dostoevsky in the prison hospital because her dad, an army officer, had been taken there, where he died. A few weeks later, Dostoevsky and the other convicts were walking in chains through the streets of Omsk on their way to the forced labor. The girl saw him and ran up to him, "Poor unfortunate men," she said, "in the name of Christ, take this." And she placed in his hand a kopek - a small coin, one hundredth of a rouble. Dostoevsky said that he treasured that kopek for a long time.

The girl's gesture of compassion gave Dostoevsky hope in a very miserable situation. He eventually completed his prison sentence and went on to write novels which express the deepest compassion for human suffering. Whatever our situation, whatever our trials, let us recognize our lives not as our right, but as a gift from God.