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Thank you!
Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus^[d] was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers^[e] approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus’^[f] feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

You know that **infamous question** that we all hear and say so often to one another?
How are you?

What do you **usually** say?

Are you like most of us, saying “Fine”...even when things aren’t fine?

Do you want to say anything at all?

There are times when we **need to tell others** exactly how we feel—that we’re not fine.

I personally believe we should be **far more honest** about how we are doing.

But sometimes, we could answer that differently.

Let me explain.

I was reading on one of my favorite Pastor blogs about a woman who says something **very simple** to that question.

When people ask her **How are you?**, she replies simply: **I’m grateful.**

I love that.

I’m taking that up as a practice myself.

Because **THAT is truth.**

It really doesn’t matter whether things are going well or not, we all have things to be grateful for, don’t we?

On good or bad days, we can still be grateful.

It is a *choice*.

I want to choose to be grateful, and what better way to live it than to say it!

Gratitude is not a command, there are certainly times to be angry or sad,

But it is in *invitation from God*—a way to live that can bring life.

That's really what this story of the 10 lepers is all about—*gratitude*.

Gratefulness. Thankfulness.

Ever seen Steve Hartman's segment on CBS evening news, called "*Everybody Has a Story*"?

It's amazing.

He selects people at random, from all over the globe, and tells their story.

You would think that only a few people would be interesting.

But incredibly, *every single person* (even those who insist they are boring) has an amazing story to tell, of trials, and blessings.

Of gratitude.

One story that I remember so well is that of 71 year old widow *Gloria Preuss*, from Elkalala, Montana.

At first glance her life seems very ordinary.

She makes pies, does crosswords, and answers the phone at the propane company.

But this woman was transformed by God's grace.

In the first year of her marriage, Gloria gave birth to a beautiful baby boy named Philip. One day she left him napping in his crib, and ran next door for just a minute. She didn't know that the stove had not been turned off.

The fire took her home and her baby.

She asked God for forgiveness, and she experienced God's grace.

She tried unsuccessfully to have more children for the next 8 years, then finally a miracle. She adopted a beautiful baby girl.

Lisa is her pride and joy and the mother of Gloria's three beloved grandchildren.

Who knew this quiet unassuming woman had such a story

of trial, blessing, gratitude and grace?

Gloria remembers it all, and gives thanks. (November 2002 CBS Evening News).

Many years ago, Luke tells the story of *ten men with leprosy*,

A horrible skin condition we know as Hansen's disease.

Because of their condition they lived as outcasts.

They were separated from their friends and family, and couldn't even worship!

But after hearing about this incredible man of God,

they approached Jesus—and begged him for healing.
 When Jesus told them to go show themselves *to the priest*,
 they *knew exactly what he was saying*.
 Sounds strange to us, but not them, because
 the only way they could approach the priests is if they were healed!
 Priests were the only ones *who could 'confirm'* someone's healing,
 And grant their re-entry into worship, community, and society!

As they ran toward the Temple, these men *saw their skin being made new*.
 Overcome with gratitude, one of them, and *ONLY ONE*
 a *Samaritan*, ran back to Jesus to thank him for his healing, and his new life.
 Ten of them were healed, and one returned to give thanks.

It is a story of trial and blessing, gratitude and grace.
 A miracle story that was passed down and retold, countless times.
 And the *hero* of the story?
 One of Jesus' favorite heroes---the unlikely one.
 He's a *Samaritan, hated and despised by Jews*.
 He's an outsider, a foreigner.
 But just like the Good Samaritan who helps the victim on the road,
 this man is the hero.
 For this Samaritan---not a Jew—is the one who returns to give thanks!

I wonder why the others kept going, and didn't offer thanks?

Were they just *too busy* with their new lives?
 Did they just assume Jesus would heal them, and they just kept going?
And how often are we the same way?

God opens a window for us, and we just climb right through—
 without saying thank you!
 God gives us an amazing opportunity, and we assume we earned it.
 God gives us a little nudge, a sign of grace, and we just breeze right past it.
How often are we like the nine, who just kept on going?

If you read all of Psalm 66 it is also a story of trials and blessings.

It is a story of gratitude.
 Psalm 66 remembers the *Exodus* from Egypt, when the Israelites escaped
 captivity.
 When God parted the Red Sea.
 When they began wandering in the wilderness for 40 years,
 but God provided for them--bread from heaven, called manna,

And quail for meat to eat.
 God provided the miracle of water from a rock.
 And God gave them 10 commandments to guide them forever!

These blessings in the wilderness were so meaningful
 The stories were passed down for centuries, and we read them today.
Every time something major happened,
the people remembered and gave thanks for
 what God did for them in the wilderness!
 It is the people of God's story of trial, and blessing.
 It is their story of gratefulness.

Every one of us has been through a ***wilderness***, haven't we?
 Maybe you are in one right now!
 But it is often in our wilderness times that we are given ***extra blessings...***
 like their manna from heaven, or water from the rock.
 We all have hard times for which we can look back, and give thanks.

And isn't it amazing that some of the ***most tragic lives***
 are filled with the most evidence of God blessing, and of gratitude?

Many famous hymn writers suffered enormous personal trials.
 The famous hymn "***Now Thank We All Our God***" was written
 by a German Lutheran Pastor named ***Martin Rinkart***,
 who was a pastor during the 30 years war, and the plague of 1637.
 During the plague he had up to over 100 funerals a week,
 including one for his own wife.
 Yet he continued to lead in worship, he continued to see God's hand at work,
 he continued to give thanks to God for blessings.
 When the city was taken over and given an unjust tax,
 he protested with a prayer vigil, and the Swedish commander was so impressed
 they withdrew the tax. Even in the worst of life,
 Martin believed in the grace of God, and he always had praise and thanks for God.

It is often during the wilderness times,
 That we experience the greatest blessings, isn't it?
 After all, it is only when you are wandering in the wilderness,
 that you know how much ***need God*** to provide for you, right?

It is only when we are *in need*
 that we realize how much we need God's help!
 It is only when we are *wandering* around lost
 that we realize how much we need God's direction!
 Only when we are *hurting*
 that we realize how much we need God's healing and hope!

We may not have leprosy, we're not escaping Egypt,
 But we each have our **own story**....
 Think for a minute, about YOUR story—
 When has God *helped you*?
 When has God *directed* you?
 When has God *relieved* your pain?
 So, how do you *give thanks* for YOUR story?
How do you show YOUR gratitude?

We have our own stories—of hard times, and blessings, right?
 You may not consider your story very remarkable,
 or think it worthy of an evening news story,
 but we each have an amazing story to share,
 of what God has done for us, and what God has given us!
We each have a story of gratitude, and thanks!

While the *world tells stories* of fear and destruction, day after day, after day,
 we have a *life-giving story* to tell, the good news of the Gospel.
 We have a story of what Jesus has done in our lives.
 And as Christians, this is why we give thanks.

While the world shares stories of despair, we share *stories of grace*.
 While the world talks about *fear and hatred*,
 We talk about *God's love*—
 While the world talks about *scarcity*,
 We talk about God's *abundance, and blessings!*

And our stories--are stories that can inspire and encourage others,
 because God is at work all around us, right?
 God is good---how often?
 All the time!

Despite our trials, there are ALWAYS blessings.
 No matter how hard things get, there is ALWAYS reason for gratitude,
 ALWAYS the opportunity to give thanks!

And sometimes it's a practice we take up—a choice,
 To 'fake it until you make it', where we just choose to, and practice,
Counting our blessings, even when we don't feel grateful.
 Eventually we start experiencing the gratitude!

Yesterday I had an MRI and decided to practice this for that hour.
 As I listened to those annoying sounds,
 I counted so many blessings, including all of you,
 And I lifted you up in prayer as you scrolled through my mind.
 Talk about changing my day!

Gratitude is our story.
 And not just at Thanksgiving.
 It is the story of God's love for us---every day of every year!
 Just the fact that Jesus died for us--- is our reason to give thanks!

At *Thanksgiving*, we often remember our blessings,
 even though we may be suffering and struggling.
 even though it is a season of loss—
 Because we're so aware of the people who aren't with us around the table,
 Or sometimes we're aware of the difficult people who ARE at the table!

But we do have reason to be grateful!
 Why? Because in the words of Paul in Romans 8,
nothing can separate us from the love of God,
 Not all the crazy relatives, not all the family pain in the world
 can separate us from God's love--
 because we have been saved by Jesus Christ!

We each have a story to tell, something to be grateful for!
 We have so many reasons, to just thank God!

And we have an answer to that infamous question of '*how are you?*',
 Our answer can be: I'm grateful.

So, we will be like the nine lepers who ran on to the Temple after Jesus healed them, and didn't look back?

Or like the *one Samaritan*, the outsider, the foreigner,
Who ran back to Jesus, to thank him for being healed?

It's easy to say we'll run back,
But sometimes our *blessings are so small,*
a sunset here, a bit of laughter there,
A smile from a friend, a hug from a neighbor,
a good day of Sunday worship.

*I wonder--will we show our gratitude to God, for EVERY blessing?
Will we say THANK YOU, no matter what the day brings?
I hope so.*

For when the Samaritan returned to Jesus, Jesus said to him
'your faith has made you well'.
Which is really interesting,
because he had already healed him of the leprosy.
He had healed all ten of them.
And it was NOT conditional---he didn't demand their faith first,
in order to be healed!
No, this man's gratitude is his demonstration of faith.
His gratitude IS his faith.

What if gratitude is the foundation of faith?
The words *your faith has made you well* aren't just about physical healing,
This is about something deeper—the heart, and soul.

Which makes sense, right?
When we are grateful, it is good for the soul, isn't it?
It gets our mind off ourselves, and onto what God has done.
We know that gratitude leads to better mental and physical health.
And gratitude is an attitude that changes our whole outlook on life.
Gratitude really is *the most life-giving response to God!*

*Friends, where has God been at work in your life?
What is your story?*
Isn't it time to remember it? And share it?

Just think how much others *may need to hear your story* of gratitude.
Maybe even around your own Thanksgiving table.
It might just be the turning point
in the life of someone you know,
or in your *very own heart*.

And what if right now, we practice something powerful.
I'll ask---How are you?
And you will all reply? I'm grateful.
Let's do it....

Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel:
We have so many reasons to be grateful--
For God is good, all the time.
And all the time, God is good.
And for that, all God's people say, Amen.