

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two weeks ago I had a great continuing education opportunity at Gettysburg. While I was at Preaching Perspectives, we talked about the upcoming Gospel texts in the lectionary. We discussed the text for today about the ten lepers. We could look at this particular story in a variety of ways. The story actually works well when we look at it in two parts.

The first part of the story is healing. The story begins with Jesus traveling towards Jerusalem. He's approached by ten lepers - Nine of these lepers were Israelites, one of them was a Samaritan. Because of their unclean status it didn't matter that they were together. Previous distinctions between an Israelite and Samaritan were ignored because of the leprosy. These ten lepers asked Jesus for mercy.

Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priests. All ten lepers were made clean in their obedience by heading towards Jerusalem to show the priests.

The second part of the story is the salvation offered to the foreigner, the Samaritan. The nine Israelites headed off to Jerusalem. The Samaritan, the foreigner thanked Jesus for all that he had done. His faith had made him well.

It's easy to pick on the nine Israelites because they didn't thank Jesus. However, they did go to Jerusalem as Jesus told them to. The Samaritan, on the other hand, didn't go to Jerusalem. Most likely the Samaritan wouldn't have been welcomed in Jerusalem. Now that the lepers were healed previous distinctions reappeared.

Jesus gave his blessing to the Samaritan. To Jesus, the distinctions that society made didn't matter. He was for everyone. God is for everyone. The Samaritan was blessed for the praise and thanks that he gave to God.

The Samaritan saw his gift in a different light than the Israelites did. The Israelites saw that they were made clean and they could re-enter life as they had previously known it by showing the priests that they were healed. The Samaritan, on the other hand, recognized God's mercy and knew that he was a sinner and thanked God for healing him.

The Samaritan's response to being healed can teach us about being thankful. The Samaritan was thankful for what had been done for him. He was healed. He could re-enter society and have a normal life. He praised God for this gift.

What are the blessings in our lives that God gives to us? We have our families, our friends, our homes. We have food on our tables, a means of transportation, and resources to pay our bills.

God surrounds us with creation. We are surrounded by beautiful trees, flowers, plants, rivers, streams, the Chesapeake Bay, and animals of all kinds.

We are blessed with many things at Saint Nicholas. There are many ministries that we can be a part of to help other people. We can grow in our understanding of the scriptures and our relationship with God through Sunday school, bible study, and many other opportunities. We gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ for fun and fellowship during different events. We are blessed to have a building that provides a place for different groups in the community to use. We are blessed with many gifted people who do extraordinary things for this community.

We are blessed in many ways, as individuals, and as families, and as a congregation.

I wonder, are we like the Samaritan who thanked and praised God or are we like the nine Israelites who went about their day to day responsibilities and did not thank God. I know that there are times that I am guilty for not thanking God and others in my life for the gifts and blessings that they provide.

As I read the text today and felt called to preach about being thankful for the blessings that we have, I was reminded of a family visit when I was on internship. Family had come to visit for the weekend and John and my nephew had cooked breakfast for everyone. I asked my niece and nephew to pray. My nephew started to pray and my niece didn't say anything. I asked her to pray with her brother and that we all would join in and thank God for the blessings that he had given us. Her response was "we don't give thanks to God at breakfast, only at dinner."

I'll admit, at the time I wasn't thrilled with her comment. But I am extremely grateful for it now, because it is always a reminder to me that I should give thanks to God for all of the blessings in my life.

As the Samaritan stopped and gave thanks to God, we too should give thanks to God for all of the blessings that he provides for us.

Thanks be to God.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.