

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; Luke 17:11-19

Jesus is nearing the end of his journey to Jerusalem in today's gospel, somewhere you and I, and he, know will lead to the end of his life on earth. Yet even as he travels to his greatest accomplishment, he does not hesitate to act compassionately towards those lepers who need his help. In the first reading today, from 2 Kings, we also heard of a leper who needed healing.

Leprosy in biblical times was far different from what we consider leprosy today. What we know of leprosy today is that it is a bacterial disease, not highly contagious, and can be effectively treated. It is commonly known as Hansen's disease, and if not treated can cause crippling of hands and feet, paralysis, and blindness. With early diagnosis and treatment, it can be cured. In biblical times leprosy was any type of rash or skin irritation. It was thought to be highly contagious and required those who showed symptoms to live outside of society. They could not return to normal life until the priest declared them clean, meaning their skin was completely cleared.

In our Old Testament reading this morning we heard how a high ranked military man, an Aramean, had contracted some type of skin disease that was considered leprosy. An Israeli girl who had been taken captive was a servant of his wife. The girl told them about a man in her home country, later it was determined to be the prophet Elisha, who could cure him. So the man approached Elisha, expecting to have a welcome befitting a person of his position, yet what he receives is the instructions to seemingly heal himself. It is his choice to follow those instructions or not.

After some coaxing from his servants, he decides to follow them and is healed. He immediately returns to Elisha and proclaims that the God of Israel is the only god, in his way giving thanks.

We hear the story of the 10 lepers and we, like Jesus, wonder, "why did only 1 of the 10 give thanks?" There are a couple of obvious, or maybe not so obvious, reasons. Jesus told the men to go to the priest. Obediently following his instructions, they go and are healed on their way. They continue following his instructions and go to the priest. Should they go back to try to find Jesus to offer thanks when they've seen the priest? They're probably giving thanks to God wherever they are, not realizing that Jesus, the healing agent, would even expect them to return thanks.

Now the one who came back and gave thanks to Jesus was a Samaritan, an outsider, one who's priest is not located in Jerusalem, but in the opposite direction, that of Mt. Gerizim in Samaria. He would not have been heading in the same direction as those from Israel. He would have been on his own when his healing came, and, realizing it was from God through Jesus, he returned to Jesus giving thanks to God. The Samaritan realized he was receiving not only a physical healing, but also a spiritual healing.

And for this he is giving thanks. Counting his blessings. Even today it has been shown when a person gives thanks, they have a better outlook on life. One of the proven homeopathic treatments of depression is to keep a gratitude journal where every evening the person records three things they are thankful for that day. It can be as mundane as giving thanks for a roof over their head to as important as avoiding a serious accident while driving that day. Having a grateful attitude will help raise a person's spirit and reviewing the entries after a week will show that there truly is reason to rejoice.

Paul tells us in the letter to the Philippians 4:4 to “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” Yet sometimes our life circumstances make it difficult to rejoice. When it feels as though life is pressing in on us and nothing is going right. Or we feel as though we’ve lost everything worth living for. How do we rejoice when life hits us smack dab in the middle of our eyes? That’s a time that it is especially helpful to keep a gratitude journal. Because when we examine our day there is always something to be thankful about. That is a time to keep in mind our Psalm from today, Psalm 111, which gives us many reasons to be grateful. The Psalms are actually a very good book to read when you are feeling troubled, challenged, agitated... they are real life feelings expressed to God in truth and raw emotion. They remind us God is big enough to handle all our feelings; there is nothing wrong with telling God exactly how we feel. God knows our thoughts anyway; putting words to them help us to deal with those feelings in a way that is authentic to God.

Back to the idea of gratitude... Have you ever read the book Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe? It’s a book about a man who was stranded on a deserted island and made the best of it. The first thing he did was to make a list. On one side he wrote the problems and then turned it over to write the blessings. One side he wrote: I have no clothing. He turned the paper over and wrote: It is warm, I need no clothing. Then he wrote I have no food. On the other side he wrote, but there’s plenty of fresh fruit and water on the island. For every negative example of his situation, he discovered a positive, something to be thankful about. It is easy to be on an island of despair, yet when we take the time to inventory our blessings, we find plenty to be grateful for.

I read an article in the online magazine of Northwestern University, which is located near the shores of Lake Michigan. It told the story of one of the most devastating shipwrecks of the 1860s when the Lady Elgin sunk off the coast of Winnetka; nearly 300 people drown. The lake was only a few miles north of the campus and the boys would often go there, never expecting to be a part of a rescue crew. Edward Spencer tied a rope around his waist, dove in and swam toward the struggling survivors. The guys on shore would pull him in and he’d dive in and do it again. He rescued 17 persons ([northwestern.edu/magazine/fall2015](http://northwestern.edu/magazine/fall2015)). Yet another article says that when interviewed later in his life what Spencer recalls most vividly about the account was that not one of the 17 persons ever thanked him ([http:// wesclark.com/ burbank/did\\_ i\\_ do\\_ my\\_ best.html](http://wesclark.com/burbank/did_i_do_my_best.html)). What an egregious oversight of those people. Yet, how often do we go through our days, weeks, maybe even months, without thinking to thank God for the goodness he’s shown us? One of the major reasons to give thanks is because Jesus grants us forgiveness. When he died on the cross and rose from the grave, he conquered death and he granted us forgiveness of all our sin.

Right now, I want you to take a minute and think about 3 things you are grateful for this morning. It can be simple, “I am thankful I woke up this morning” or “Thank you Jesus for saving me from my sin” or maybe there’s something deeper for which you are feeling thankful. Now, simply give them to God. Take the time to thank God for all we have received, because every good thing we have has come to us from God  
All glory be to God.