“***One Returned***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, Oct. 12, 2025

**Psalm 30:2–4**

2 O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. 3 O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. 4 Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.

**Luke 17:11–19**

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease 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’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? 18 Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

I picked an Old Testament passage that speaks of healing, in order to correlate with our New Testament healing story. It is natural to be full of thanks when one has been healed, but we don’t see that with every character in *this* story. We only see it with the psalmist and with one of the lepers Jesus healed here, namely, with the Samaritan. The story tells us the lepers are healed as they walk—but only the foreigner stops and thinks, and goes back, praising God. When he reaches Jesus he throws himself down on the ground and gives thanks.

Jesus pays attention to the fact that the fellow is praising God, and that the only one who is praising God is the foreigner. There is a sad irony in that. None of the others, presumably Galilean Jews, came back to give thanks and praise. They were brought up within Judaism, and *should* have recognized an act of divine kindness, but they just took it and ran. No doubt they wanted to quickly leave their lepers’ life behind. Maybe when they got home, they could reflect and say “what an amazing miracle; how fortunate we are!”

As we often see in the healing stories, Jesus not only performs a healing but imparts a teaching. Here the teaching is simply expressed through a question: Weren’t ten made clean? Why is only one of them, the foreigner, returning to give glory to God? There is a subtle anti-nationalism in the story.

Jesus loved his apostles and recognized their strong feelings of nationalism. He did not look down on them for this, but wanted to open their eyes to a broader vision that could include all nationalities. He was hoping they would allow their minds to expand, to become aware that God’s love was not limited to the Jews; God loves all people.

It mainly seems to be a lesson showing that many people are insufficiently grateful for the things that are done for them. It probably is true that most people are insufficiently grateful for the gifts they have received in life. Most people assume they earned those gifts, or they are entitled to them because of their inherent talent. A more reverent and intelligent response would naturally be to thank God with some amazement at the wonderful gifts—*including* the talents—we have received, and to realize that we are not necessarily entitled to them.

The gifts of God are meant to be benefit others, not just oneself. We can get enjoyment from the goods we have been given, but we should also think of how we can serve others, and do God’s will in the whole course of living. One of our blessings is sharing the joy of what we have received, telling our stories of God’s love. There is joy in the morning!

Another thing to notice is salvation in this story. As in many stories, healing is parallel with salvation. The final verse, in the NRSV, has Jesus saying “your faith has made you well,” which is a secondary meaning of the word *sesoken*, which has the *primary* meaning: “has *saved*.”

What Jesus says to the Samaritan is “*your* faith has *saved* you.” The Samaritan has *learned* something from his healing. “Your faith has saved you” is an important teaching. Salvation is more than just a physical healing. Presumably the Samaritan learns that his gratitude is important. Forever after he will be re-telling the story of his healing, and what Jesus said to him afterward. What a joy to share, what a legacy to pass down through the generations!

Salvation includes the willingness to be taught, to be led by truth. And on that point, we are turned back to reflect upon ourselves, and our spiritual life. Are we being taught? Of course! Are we being spiritually transformed? Absolutely! Salvation involves ongoing transformation. This transformation can be sudden, as in our reading today, but often it is subtle, developing slowly. If you’re being led in the truth, you’re being led toward a spiritual destination. As one of the Proverbs says, in an older translation, “the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov 4:18 ASV). Our life experiences help to season, to shape our development, to create our “spiritual aroma.”

I ask you to trust that God is leading you unto that perfect day when you will understand what is the way forward and will know, more thoroughly, what God’s will for you is. If you believe this, gratitude comes naturally. What an amazing destiny! God will lead you onto an eternal pathway. And that pathway is yours, for the choosing.

Even if you have disabilities and disease, you can look forward to daily blessings here, and ultimately to a new life in a new world. A lady named Sandy Knudsen tells the story of how, not long after her and Ray’s marriage, he was diagnosed with a degenerative brain disease. Before long, she had to help him get dressed, brush his teeth, and eat. It was only Ray’s body that was declining; his mind was still sharp and his spirit was full of gratitude. She says he taught her much about faith and trust. He had a great sense of humor.

She writes “So far, my life’s journey has seen its share of hardship and pain. But through all of the difficulties, I believe that I have become stronger. I continue to see the beauty, love and faithfulness of God shine through and I am thankful” (*Devotional Stories of Resilience and Positive Thinking*, 212). It definitely takes strength of character deeply rooted in faith to navigate life’s journeys, the dips and bumps in our path.

I want to let you know that, in the next life, you will be healed from any spiritual or psychological illnesses, and your spiritual body will simply not be susceptible to any physical illnesses. We will look back on those hard times, not dismissing or diminishing their importance, for we made it through those tough times with friends, family, and faith. And Jesus is with us in *these* moments, too, as we grow in our awareness. We will *forever* be leaning on the everlasting arms. Can I get an amen?