

**Thursday, November 23, 2017 – Thanksgiving Day**

**Rev. Elizabeth Molitors**

*“As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him.”  
Luke 17:*

My niece is getting married in a couple of months. She and her fiance met in college; both of them were in the same creative writing program there. A love of books and writing is something they share and so as they've been planning their wedding, they've chosen a literary theme.

Their wedding invitations look like a book, and on the cover are the words, “Once upon a time” - the start to many a great story. Inside the “book” are chapter titles which offer details about the date and time of the wedding and reception: Chapter 1 – *In which they are married.* Chapter 2 – *In which they dance.*

Ever since I received my invitation, I've been thinking about the events and stories taking place around me in terms of chapter titles, like my niece and her fiance came up with. I've applied the same thought process to scriptural stories.

So, today's story about Jesus and the lepers might best be titled, Chapter 17: *In which Jesus is appalled by bad manners.* Or, alternatively, Chapter 17: *In which Jesus was ticked because only 1 of the 10 lepers came back.* Or, more broadly, Chapter 17: *In*

*which much of humanity, once again, disappoints Jesus.*

Too often, it seems this particular story of healing is presented as an indictment of those ingrates – the nine lepers healed who never came back to Jesus. As listeners, we're put into the position of self-examination and self-judgment – would I be one of the nine or would I be like the one? We're left either feeling bad about ourselves or self-congratulatory.

I don't know that either of these attitudes work, though. Because when have you known Jesus to be a chider, especially when we're talking about extremely sick and marginalized people, like these lepers? Oh, yes – Jesus sometimes get after the scribes and pharisees and other self-important religious bigwigs. But he's got nothing but generous compassion for those seeking his help. And many times, after a person has been healed by Jesus, he admonishes them not to make a fuss: *Just go on about your day, no need to tell anyone about this.*

Something else must be going on in this story, then.

Maybe, instead of taking the nine to task, maybe Jesus is really just expressing his joy and excitement and amazement about the one. Amazement that the one leper has

tapped into or stumbled across the secret formula that takes the healing power of Jesus – the power originally focused just on him and his 9 friends – and flings that power out into the universe, through gratitude.

Gratitude is not simply about manners – saying thank you and writing your great-aunt Gladys about how much you enjoyed her Christmas fruitcake. Gratitude is a spiritual practice, an acknowledgment of our indebtedness and connection to something or someone or someones beyond ourselves. Gratitude is a source of positive energy which, when expressed, broadcasts far-reaching ripples – ripples which soothe and heal and transform the world.

The author and teacher, Toni Morrison, talks about gratitude as a kind of leadership, too, something to be paid forward to benefit others. She writes, “I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.’”

Like the lepers who encountered Jesus, we are blessed and healed in many ways by God, not just for our own benefit, but to bring blessing and healing to others. Grateful though we may be, we are not meant simply to receive these gifts, but to release them

and their transformative power. We are meant to write new chapters, which the world is hungry to read, In which Thanksgiving is not only a day or a meal, but the very core of our being. May we be grateful always, grateful aloud, grateful with and for one another – for the healing of the world. *Amen.*