

**“The One Who Remembered”**  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**November 19, 2017**

**First Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 8:1-10**

This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. <sup>2</sup>Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. <sup>3</sup>He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. <sup>4</sup>The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup>Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup>Therefore keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup>For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup>a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup>a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. <sup>10</sup>You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

**Second Scripture Reading: Luke 17:11-19**

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



**Sermon: “The One Who Remembered”**

Ten lepers are healed by Jesus. That’s a pretty impressive story of healing. Sort of like when chess master Bobby Fischer played 50 opponents simultaneously.<sup>1</sup> Jesus doesn’t just heal, He heals a *crowd* of people... at the same time! But Luke doesn’t tell this story to highlight Jesus’ prowess or showmanship. And he doesn’t really tell this story to exhibit Jesus’ ability to heal. Because Jesus actually does more than heal the physical ailments of these ten people, He gives them back their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> “Bobby Fischer Playing 50 Opponents Simultaneously, 1964.” *Rare Historical Photos*, Rare Historical Photos, 13 Oct. 2017, [rarehistoricalphotos.com/bobby-fisher-playing-50-opponents-simultaneously-hollywood-hotel-1964/](http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/bobby-fisher-playing-50-opponents-simultaneously-hollywood-hotel-1964/).

Now leprosy, or as we know it today, Hansen’s Disease, is curable. But it wasn’t that long ago that there was no known treatment for what was believed to be a highly contagious disease. So, sufferers were quarantined; literally cut-off from their communities.<sup>2</sup>

Kalaupapa was a leper colony established on the Hawaiian Island of Molokai where people diagnosed with leprosy were, by law, sent to keep them from infecting others. That law was changed in 1969, but for over a century, Kalaupapa was the home to thousands of people who were tragically removed from their families and communities out of fear. In a history of the colony, Nancy Brede, a resident who was sent there as a child in 1936 wrote about her experience of being sent there “We couldn't say bye to our families, I just cried and waved until I couldn't see my mother no more.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, In the Bible, Leprosy is really a generic, non-specific term for a host of skin ailments that were characterized by rough, scaly patches of skin. That means conditions like Psoriasis, Eczema, Acne, or even Ringworm could be designated “Leprosy.” We know that Leprosy in the Bible is a broad category and not a specific illness, because in Leviticus, we find procedures for dealing with leprosy that is found in clothing and buildings.<sup>4</sup>

Hansen’s Disease does not affect clothing and buildings.

Hansen’s Disease was included in the category of Leprosy. It can begin with thickening skin, blisters, and loss of skin pigmentation that results in blotches and whitened flesh.<sup>5</sup> So, ancient fear of *that* disease might explain why *anyone* with blotchy, scaly, discolored skin might have been labeled a Leper. But for the sake of our discussion today, while all Hansen’s Disease is leprosy, not all leprosy is Hansen’s Disease.

What Jesus cured was likely just some non-specific skin ailment. But the point here is not that Jesus healed a physical ailment, but that He healed a spiritual and emotional one. In Jesus’ time, Leprosy caused great fear because it was considered a sign of uncleanness and sufferers were often banished from their communities. Leviticus 13 says this: “The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”<sup>6</sup>

Think about that for a moment. When we have a rash or a pimple, our instincts are to hide it. We try to cover them up with long sleeves, maybe a turtle neck sweater or a dab of makeup. We don’t like people seeing our imperfections. Much less drawing attention to them. And when we’re are more seriously ill, we often keep the nature and extent of our illness a private matter. There are actually laws that protect and insure our privacy when we’re sick. But here, for the leper, there is no hiding the condition. In fact, the man or woman who has been declared unclean must say so loudly so that other people can avoid inadvertently coming into contact with them and making themselves unclean, too. It’s like children on the playground, running away from the person with “cooties,” only much, much worse.

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<sup>2</sup> “Leprosy.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 17 Nov. 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy.

<sup>3</sup> Senthilingam, Meera. “Taken from Their Families: The Dark History of Hawaii’s Leprosy Colony.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 9 Sept. 2015, www.cnn.com/2015/09/09/health/leprosy-kalaupapa-hawaii/index.html.

<sup>4</sup> Pilch, John J. “Leprosy.” *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, Edited by Katherine Doob Salkenfeld, Abingdon Press, 2008, pp. 635-637.

<sup>5</sup> Pilch, 635-637.

<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 13:45-46, NRSV

The man or woman with leprosy was also required to live outside the community, alone. How soul-crushing must that be; to be forced away from your family, and friends, and made to live on the outskirts of town because of a skin condition that you can do nothing about?

So, imagine what these ten people must have experienced. Imagine how many times they prayed for healing; tried to use different remedies peddled by snake-oil salesmen; suffered the heartbreak of not just their disease, but of being shunned by people they knew and loved.

Jesus offers them a way out of all that. With just a command to show themselves to the priest, in English it's just seven words in total, they were healed. While we tend to focus on the miracle of a medical reversal, what truly matters is that they are restored to full participation in society. Once the priest examines them, and declares them to be clean, they can pick up their lives where they left off: live in their own homes, do business in the village market, touch their loved ones and be touched by them. They no longer have to declare themselves "Unclean" to everyone they meet. They are no longer living beneath the weight of the stigma of their affliction.

What Jesus has given them is not just health. Jesus has given them back their lives and their dignity. How grateful they must have been! But Luke tells us, of the ten who were healed that day, only one comes back to give thanks and praise God for what has been done for him. Only one.

Larry Yarborough, professor of Religion at Middlebury College notes that "giving thanks and praise to God is a common theme in the writings of Luke."<sup>7</sup>

When the shepherds in the fields are sent by angels to see the newborn Christ-child, Luke tells us they returned "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen..."<sup>8</sup>

When the paralyzed man is lowered through the roof because his friends can't get him through the crowds around Jesus, Jesus heals him, and the man goes "to his home, glorifying God."<sup>9</sup>

When Jesus heals a blind man on the road to Jericho, we are told that the man "...followed Him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God."<sup>10</sup>

Yarbrough argues that "Luke recounts this story [of the lepers that we read today] "to emphasize the proper response to any act of grace: thanks and praise to God."<sup>11</sup>

You see, ten people are healed, but only one seems to remember the source of that healing. Only one turns back to thank Jesus for what He has done. But that might actually be understandable. Have you ever been so excited about something that you completely lost yourself in the moment? When both my sons were born, I didn't thank the doctors and nurses in the delivery room. I was overwhelmed with joy,

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<sup>7</sup> Yarborough, Oliver Larry. "Luke 17:11-19, Exegetical Perspective." *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4*, edited by David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, pp. 165–169.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2:20, NRSV

<sup>9</sup> Luke 5:25, NRSV

<sup>10</sup> Luke 18:43, NRSV

<sup>11</sup> Yarborough, 165-169

anxiety, concern for Mary, and more than a little fear that this little thing was now totally dependent on us for everything... food, clothing...shoes...college... how am I ever going to be able to pay for college?!? I was a little preoccupied.

And so were these ten. They had just realized that the affliction, no matter how minor, that had cut them off from any semblance of a normal life was gone. They didn't want to waste another minute. Who would they go to see first? Who would they hug? Think of all the restaurants and museums and sporting events that they had been missing out on because they couldn't be in contact with other people! They rushed away immediately to see the priest who could certify that their suffering was over.

But one remembered. And that one came back to give thanks.

Now, there are lots of reasons why we don't give thanks for what we have received. I think there are four main attitudes that prevent people from being thankful:

1. *"I don't recognize it."*

I think often we don't realize that we have been given tremendous gifts for which we *should* be thankful. We look around and see that it is normal for people to live in homes and eat meals and be warm from the cold. It is normal for people to have jobs and friends; to have medicines when you're sick; to have joy and satisfaction in your life. Those things are normal and, so we don't give thanks for what is expected. But boy we sure do complain when we don't have those things.

It's impossible to know where and when God has acted in our lives and so, unless we win the lottery or survive something traumatic, we tend to take things for granted.

2. *"I deserve it."*

I think we sometimes feel like everything we have, we have earned, through our own talent, our own smarts, our own creativity. Of course, my life is great, I work hard, I deserve this. We see this a lot with folks who are very successful who don't recognize how blessed they are, especially football fans. Yesterday, Ohio State whooped up on Illinois, but on the radio, I heard someone complaining after the game about Ohio State's quarterback. So many fans seem to think their team deserves to win so much that they simply can't appreciate it when they do. Likewise, many people believe they deserve the bounty they enjoy, that they can't appreciate what they have.

3. *"I did it."*

Closely related to this first two is the concept of self-sufficiency. I don't recognize the gift and if I do, I deserve the gift, because I am the one who made the gift happen. When I was a kid, my Father and I played video games together. I remember doing really well at one of those old 80's hand-held electronic football games and thinking, "Of course I'm winning. I'm awesome at this game!" But then at some point I realized that my Dad was playing me on the easiest setting.

We tend to put too much stock in our talents and fail those talents come from God and that God is always helping us to use them.

4. *"I forgot it."*

I'll admit that I pray hardest when I am at my most desperate. When my Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer back when I was in college. When Harry had to go to the hospital with croup when he was a baby. When I've just locked and shut my car door and I'm not sure if I remembered to get my

key out of the ignition first. But after the initial panic passes and things return to normal, it can be easy to just forget how frightened I was and how grateful I should be. Life keeps happening and I focus on the task at hand and simply... forget.

But whatever the reason, whether we don't recognize the gifts God gives us, we think we deserve them, we did them, or we forget them, it's important for us to recognize the blessings in our lives, to understand that they are God's doing, and to give thanks for them. That's what it means to be in true relationship with God.

Think about the Halloween that just passed. How many of the trick-or-treaters that came to your door said thank you? I'm sure some did, but at our house, most did not; but that's understandable. There really isn't a relationship there. It's just ritual. You ring the bell, the home owner opens the door, says something like "Oooo...how scary," or "Oooo... how cute," the kids say "TRICK-OR-TREAT," you drop candy in their bags, and then they leave to go to the next house. That's the extent of that relationship.

But in a family, we know each other, we are connected to each other. And so, when we share something or receive a gift, we say thank you for it. And even if we don't say the words, we can enact our thanks, with signs of affection or by helping with a chore or by being kind.

That's the nature of relationship. And if we truly love God and are in the family of God, that relationship must be characterized by thanks and praise to God for all that God does and has done for us.

Author Anne Lamott writes that the two best prayers she knows are "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you."<sup>12</sup> Those are simple prayers, but they are deeply profound, and they always go together. We pray thanks to God and we live lives in an attitude of thanks to God because God has done marvelous things, most of which we don't even recognize.

Jim was one of my students in Clemson. He told me a story once about his little brother, John who was born with a disability and lives his life from a wheelchair. John is left-handed, although this was never seen as anything but an interesting characteristic. Until one day when his doctor explained to the family that John's disability was related to what was going on in the left side of his brain. And that it was actually pretty fortunate that John was left-handed, since had he been right handed, his disability might have been far worse.

Jim told me that his family had never thought to be thankful for John being left-handed. But now they thank God for that little fact, every day.

Most of us don't have daily experiences of healing on a dramatic scale like the blind man or the lepers. Most of our experiences of grace appear more banal than that. But we will never know how different our lives would be without the gifts of grace and mercy with which God fills them to overflowing every day.

Thursday of this week is the Thanksgiving holiday. Most of us will make preparations for a meal with family and friends. Some of us will settle in for football games and parades. And some will head out that afternoon to get an early start on Black Friday sales.

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<sup>12</sup> Lamott, Anne. *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*. Anchor Books, 2006. p. 82.

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All of that is fine and good. I like football and pumpkin pie as much as the next guy. But I'd like us all to add something to our day and that's to set aside some time to actually be thankful; to give thanks and praise to God for everything in our lives, even the stuff we take for granted. To be, not like the nine who, while appreciative of what they'd been given, forgot to show that appreciation and give thanks to the One who gave it, but rather to be like the one who remembered.

And then to continue that practice of Giving thanks and praise to God every day.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.