

## Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 17:11-19 (NT page 1051)

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### Background to the reading

Our reading is all about thanksgiving in a practical sense which is also the theme of Harvest.

Luke is the only gospel writer who has three stories where a Samaritan plays an important part. The Samaritans were hated and despised by the Jews in Jesus' time. There was a huge animosity between both groups. Both groups excluded the other from their respective cultic centers, the Jerusalem temple and the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim. The Samaritans, for example, were forbidden access to the inner courts of the temple, and any offering they might give was considered as if it were from a Gentile. Samaritans were in practice treated as Gentiles. All marriage between the groups was therefore forbidden, and social relations were greatly restricted. With such proscribed separation, it is not surprising that any interaction between the two groups was strained. The mere term Samaritan was one of contempt on the lips of Jews and among some scribes it possibly would not even be uttered. No Jew would be seen in the company of a Samaritan because they were branded as unclean and therefore unholy. So if you touched a Samaritan or socialised with them, you were regarded as unclean too and excluded for going to the temple.

I am sure the first Jewish listeners of our reading were sitting on the edge of their proverbial chairs when they heard the hateful mention of Samaria. Luke is not deliberately telling his readers that Jesus found himself in the northern part of Samaria. Usually the Jews would not travel through Samaria but take the longer route to Jerusalem by passing it altogether.

Jesus was entering a village when 10 men with leprosy approached him, shouting out in a loud voice. It was custom for all those who had leprosy to shout out 'Unclean! unclean!' to warn others not to come near. Leprosy, according to the people of Jesus' time was a contagious incurable skin disease of which the law forbid them to come near other healthy people. There were different types of leprosy that afflict persons according to Lev. 13. Though it is not clear what these skin diseases were, it is certain that they were not modern leprosy or as we know it "**Hansen's disease**". The people who were infected were covered with white spots, causing terrible sores and swellings. Leprosy was also regarded as God's punishment over their sin. They were confined to live outside the cities and could only come near other people once the priest declared them healthy.

But in our reading Jesus tested their motive for confessing Him as "Master". The Greek word "epistata" is only used in this context in Luke and in the New Testament, meaning

as having the authority of a teacher or rabbi among His disciples. He orders them to go and show them to the priest. Clearly – if they expected a miraculous instant healing, they would have been disappointed. But they obey Jesus and on the way they are healed.

But then only ONE turns around to praise God. He showed his gratefulness and thanks by humbling himself at the feet of Jesus. This is the only place in all of the NT where someone pays homage to Jesus! With this Luke demonstrated and emphasized Jesus' uniqueness. He cannot only forgive sins but also heal lepers.

And then the surprise, this man is a “stranger of foreigner”, a Samaritan! What a shocking surprise this must have been to any Jewish reader! I think they would have felt quite insulted.

And then Jesus says to him to continue with his life because his faith have saved him and made him whole again.

So what was Luke trying to say to his listeners?

He was telling them to be aware of the big difference of being healed and being healed and saved! 10 lepers were healed but not necessarily saved. Only one persevered in his faith and were not only healed but also saved. Luke is telling his listeners to persevere like the leaper, actually to be like the “hateful” Samaritan!

And he was also telling them not to discriminate against anyone. Although the leper was a Samaritan, he was the only one who had faith and found salvation. Thanksgiving has nothing to do with race. It is a matter of commitment and conviction, born from experiencing joy that surpasses all human understanding! Amen

## **MP 23**

## **All things bright and beautiful**

### **Sermon**

Our reading this morning gives us a true example of what practical thanksgiving means. It is about turning around irrespective of your background, ethnic origins, sexuality or religion like the ONE leper did. It is all about the reaction of your sheer joy and happiness. Thanksgiving is about showing gratitude, love and appreciation.

Harvest thanksgiving means exactly this. It is about climbing of the proverbial combine harvester and thanking God for the good harvest. It is also showing this thanks by means of giving and sharing it with other who do not have as much. Here in West Lothian in Bathgate, we have the Bethany Christian trust who looks after people who are homeless and in Edinburgh they focus on people living on the streets without any food.

But Harvest is also a time to reflect on our own gifts and talents and how we use it to turn around and thank God for all the blessings that He bestow on us. It is about where

we are in our journey of faith. Are we like the 9 men who had faith but no practical way of showing it or are we the ONE who had faith and actually showed it by turning around and doing something to show it to the world? Faith and practical ways of thanksgiving always goes hand in hand. Gratitude is an act that always follow faith.

And yes to share our gifts and talents with other people in our congregation and Parish will mean a great deal of sacrifice and commitment. I mean let's be honest, to go away every weekend and stay in a nice hotel is less stress than a children's address or playing in the band or helping out with the Sunday school? But God knows the sacrifice and commitment and He will always help us out. And we have to admit that there are things money and comfort cannot buy namely love, happiness, salvation and peace. Personally I do not know of anyone who - while doing God's work – had experienced the stress, worries and anxieties that is so part of our worldly environment today. I do not know of any believer who have died with a frown on their faces.

I must also admit I have seen with my own eyes how followers of Jesus, once they committed themselves fully to his service, have changed for the better. I have also experienced how he had multiplied their talents and gifts for the advancement of his kingdom.

All we have to do, is to stop and turn around irrespective if we are the only ONES!

May God help us to be faithful and hardworking servants showing our love and gratefulness to the Lord in practical ways like the leper. May this Harvest be a special one that we will always remember as the day we TURNED around and said thank you to God in a practical committed manner!

It reminds me of a story I read on the internet.

Once upon a time there was a king who decided that because of the rich harvest, he will have a thanksgiving day. He was going to ask some child from the village to come up the hill to the castle and eat dinner with the Prince and Princess. It was rumored, too, that this child would be given good gifts by the King. But it must be a very special kind of child indeed. That they all knew.

The day before this day of thanksgiving the messenger of the King came down from the castle and went from door to door of the homes in the village. He went first to the house of the provost. It was a very pretentious house with tall pillars in front, and it stood on a wide street. It seemed likely that the provost's child might be chosen to go with the messenger to the castle for the thanksgiving. She was dressed in silk, and her hair was curled, and the provost had packed a great hamper with sweets as an offering for the King.

"Are you ready to keep the feast as the King would like you to?" asked the messenger. "Oh, yes!" said the provost's child. "I have on my best dress, and here are plenty of sweets to eat. Will you take me?"

But the messenger shook his head, for the child was not ready

Then the King's messenger went on until he came to the house where the captain of the guards lived. The captain's little boy was quite sure that he would be chosen to go with the messenger to the castle for the thanksgiving. He wore a uniform with silver braid and buttons like that which the guards wore. A sword hung at his side, and he wore a soldier's cap. He held the cap in his hand, so that he could put it on quickly.

"Are you ready to keep the thanksgiving day as the King would like you to?" asked the messenger.

"Oh, yes!" said the child of the captain of the guards. "I have my sword here and I can fight any one who crosses our path on the way to the castle. Will you take me?"

But the messenger shook his head a second time, for the child was not ready.

Then he did not know which way to go, and he began to think that he would not be able to find any guest for the King's feast. As he waited, he saw two children, a girl and a boy, coming toward him. They were poor children, and one was leading the other, for he was lame. The messenger looked at them. The little girl held her head so high, and smiled so bravely that no one would have noticed her old dress and the holes in her coat. The messenger stood in the road in front of her and spoke to her.

"Are you ready to keep the thanksgiving day as the King would like you to?" he asked.

The little girl looked up in the messenger's face in surprise.

"No, I am not ready," she said, "but this child is. I am bringing him because he is lame, and because he is hungry. Will you take him?" she asked.

"Yes," said the messenger, "and you, too. There is room at the King's table for both."

Let us all go now and in practical ways thank the Lord with our talents and gifts – inside this building worshipping Him as the Only Lord, outside this building reaching out to all the children that is so hungry for God's word, equipping the teenagers in our midst to reach out to their friends in such a way that they too can serve the Lord, changing the lives of all our Parishioners in a meaningful way through our generosity of our gifts and talents.

May we use our gifts and talents to bring others to God's table where there is always enough to eat just like the wee girl did in the story.

Amen