

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
What does a grateful heart look like?

On another occasion, as Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he was passing along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² When he entered a certain village, ten men with leprosy met him. Standing at a distance, ¹³ they called out loudly, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” As they went away they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, thanking him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus responded, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go your way. Your faith has saved you.”

—Luke 17:11-19 EHV

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His *mercy* endures forever. Mercy. That’s what the ten lepers cried out for to Jesus. Mercy. **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”** I can understand why they cried out for mercy. They needed it. In the days of Jesus, leprosy was an incurable disease. And evidently it was contagious. If a person had leprosy, that person needed to live outside of the camp. He was separated from everybody else. Every time a person walked his way, he would shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” In fact, there are three words in our account that really tell us everything we need to know about leprosy: **“At a distance.”** At a distance.

They were required to keep as far away from all healthy people as possible. Lepers were never allowed to be near their loved ones again. The priest served as the examiner to determine the severity of this skin disease. The priest would have told them, “I’m sorry. You can never go home. You can never hold your wife in your arms again. You can never wrestle with your son again. You can never kiss your little girl goodnight again. If you see them, and touch them, they may get leprosy themselves. If you love them, you will never get near them again.” At a distance.

So, the man goes off. Alone. To rot. To die. The only consolation these men found was the consolation they offered each other. I can picture them sharing stories with each other about their families. One man talks about the time he took his son fishing. Another reminisces about the good times he shared with his wife. And their hearts drop. They will never experience those joys again. At a distance.

They were also ceremonially unclean, which means that they were unfit to worship God. They couldn’t go to church. They couldn’t receive comfort from family or friends. Cut off. Hurting. Dying. Rejected. At a distance from people and at a distance from God.

But one day Jesus comes walking down the road. He walks toward the lepers. He was heading into a village, and the ten lepers recognize Jesus. **“Standing at a distance, they called out loudly, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”**

When they saw Jesus walking toward them, they didn’t cry out with a loud voice, “Unclean! Unclean!” No. When they see Jesus, they cry together with a loud voice, “Mercy, mercy!” You can understand why, can’t you?

But do you cry those words with the same fortitude as those lepers? **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!”** Oh, we live in a society that doesn’t like to rely on someone else for help. We like to be independent, not reliant on anybody else. Self-sufficient, that’s what we are.

But what happens when we need help? What happens when you have been diagnosed with cancer? What happens when you are in debt and you don’t see a way out? What happens when your relationships are strained and you don’t know how to fix them? What do you cry out then?

I wonder if at times we feel entitled. We may cry out to God, “Lord, I have cancer. Heal me. Lord, I’m in debt. Get me out. Lord, fix my relationships. Help me out here, Lord.” Do we ever approach God as though he owes us something? Do we think we are entitled to what we are requesting?

You know, the cry for mercy says the opposite of entitlement. **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on me.”** The cry for mercy says, “I have nothing to offer. You don’t owe me a thing. But look at my wretched condition. Have compassion. Pity me, miserable creature that I am. See how much I need your help. Show me your mercy. Rescue me! Deliver me! Lord, have mercy on me.”

Those are humbling words that lay our soul bare before Jesus. It does not hide behind complaints as if we deserve better. It doesn't make requests as though God owes us. It doesn't ask because we are entitled. No. It's just a cry out to Jesus in our helplessness. Like lepers who are outcasts, hopeless if left to ourselves.

It recognizes that Jesus would have every right to walk on the other side of the road. But we need help. Not because we deserve it, but because he's a merciful God who can offer it. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" is a cry that falls before the Lord, recognizing he does not want us to remain in our pitiful state.

Jesus is not some distant God that is unconcerned about what you go through. Jesus has some travel plans, but he's not going to walk on the other side of the road and avoid you where you are at.

Although Luke says that **"ten men with leprosy met [Jesus],"** it's really Jesus who meets us. He shapes his travel plans to be near, not to be far. More than that, Jesus shapes my travel plans to keep me from being at an out-of-range distance from him.

He may allow me to be infected with the leprosy of loneliness and hopelessness, illness and aggravation so that I **MUST** call for help. He may allow certain troubles and tribulations to come into my life so that I'm forced to call for help. **"Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!"**

And I can see his footprints. I can see him walking toward me in my hopeless and lonely situation. His footprints are there. In the dirt road. Walking. Coming into contact with sick sinners. I know it's true. It's written down. When I see Jesus approaching those who had leprosy and he doesn't turn away, I know that he doesn't turn away from anyone, not even me.

And Jesus walks toward you. He doesn't run away. There's no problem too big for him to handle. There's no problem too trivial for him to dismiss. No. He comes toward you. Not separating himself from you because of sin, but taking sin upon himself so you can be with God. He's there. He comes in bread and wine. Every time you take the Lord's Supper. His body and blood given and poured out for you. He comes to you. He promises, **"I am always with you, to the very end of the age."**

Jesus heard the prayers of the ten lepers who called to him for help, just as he hears our prayers for help today. **"When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' As they went away they were cleansed."**

The priests were in charge of determining if someone had leprosy or not. The only reason for these ten to go to the priests would be if they were cured.

Do you hear Jesus' promise implied in that command? The fact that he told them to "Go" indicates the promise is there to heal. Strengthened by that promise, their faith acts. They go, before the healing takes place. They trust Jesus. And on the way, they are healed. All of them are healed. All ten are healed.

If you were acting this out in a movie, how would you show this scene of the lepers being healed? Would you not show them suddenly looking at each other in amazement at how the ugly sores were suddenly gone? They roll up their sleeves, they look at their arms, then they look at their legs, and everything is clean, not a spot remains. Listen to them shout for joy and say, "Let's run and show ourselves to the priests so we can be back together with our families and friends. I cannot wait to be home again." You can see them rushing through the streets which they were not allowed to walk. People observing, noticing. They wanted to be reunited with their families. They wanted the priest to announce to them that they were clean so that they could once again participate in the temple celebrations.

But did they really give thanks? Oh, it looks like it. They were following Jesus' directive. With joy they would have gone about their daily lives. But one thing they had forgotten. One important aspect of their thankful lives they had left out.

They forgot about Jesus. They may have been anxious to get back to the religious celebrations at the temple, but their religion was completely empty. It was void. It was dead. Except for one person from the group. Only one man, who wasn't even a Jew, one man saw what was most important in his life.

"One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, thanking him. And he was a Samaritan." What does a grateful heart look like? You can see it. A grateful heart looks like feet that turn around and walk toward Jesus. A grateful heart looks like a face that is bowing low before the Lord. A grateful heart erupts in a loud voice, exploding with praise and thanks.

My friends, what does your grateful heart look like? Is it like the nine that just can't wait to get on with your life? Or is it like the one that can't wait to get back to Jesus? Can people see your grateful heart? Do they see where your feet walk? Do they see your face bowing low? Do they hear your voice erupting in praise and thanks?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm glad you're here today. You've come to meet Jesus, haven't you? And he does walk to you today in his Word and Sacrament. Here is a place where we publicly give thanks. Here is a place where we praise our God with a loud voice. Isn't that all part of why you are here today?

But you need mercy. You need forgiveness. You need to know that you are not separate from God anymore. You need to know that Jesus walked toward you, just as he walked toward those lepers, on his way to Jerusalem. To do what? He's heading to Jerusalem to take upon himself our sin-sick souls. To set us free from the burden of sin and its effects.

And really, that's what set that one leper apart from the other nine. Jesus' words to this man reveal why he came back with a thankful heart. Jesus said to him, **"Get up and go your way. Your faith has saved you."**

In what way? It was not his faith that made him physically well. All ten were healed. But it was something else. His faith saw something else. His faith saw Jesus as not only the Physician of the body, but more importantly the Physician of the soul. This man could live a thankful life because Jesus saved him.

And how would he thank Jesus? What does a grateful heart look like? Jesus said, **"Get up and go."** And this man would. He would go back to his family, but he would live a new life. He would publicly live a life for Jesus. He would live a life as a redeemed, restored, forgiven child of God.

So, Jesus speaks to us today. He says, **"Get up and go."** What does your grateful heart look like? You are healed. You are washed clean. You are forgiven. You have peace with God. Now live with your husband or wife, family and friends as a redeemed child of your heavenly Father. Get up and go, and live your life for God. That's what a grateful heart looks like. Amen.