As you know there are many stories in the bible that talk about Jesus healing the sick. The story that we just read was not one of them. By that I mean, the focus of our story today was NOT about the act of healing or the healer, but instead, the focus was on the recipients and their consequent response of the healing. This was a story of **self-discovery, humility, gratitude,** and **thanksgiving**.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem traveling from Galilee to Samaria. As he was entering this small village, those lepers came up to him pleading for their healing. They seemed to know who Jesus was because they kept their distance away from him perhaps knowing that they were considered spiritually unclean after all. They knew their place in society.

Now if you noticed, Jesus didn’t seem to make any physical contact with these lepers either, at least our text didn’t really tell us that. He only instructed them to go see the priest and they would be cleaned. OK, sounds fair enough…so they followed the instruction of what they were told. The actual healing took place WHILE they were on their way to go see the priest. As these lepers realized that their leprosy was disappearing off their bodies right before their eyes and they rejoiced and celebrated, they kept on going on their way to the priests in order to get fully spiritually cleansed. Our passage didn’t really tell us whether or not the other nine actually ended up at the priest or did they just go home to celebrate among their friends and family. The focus quickly shifted to the one who did return to Jesus to thank him for what he did.

The leper who returned turned out to be double ostracized from the community…not only was he a leper but he was also a foreigner. And to add more to the insult - a Samaritan. Now as you know the Jews and Samaritans did not get along. They were not even supposed to talk to each other, share the same well together, or walk on the same side of the road, never mind having physical contact with one another. But this grateful Samaritan leper, realizing that he had been healed of his leprosy. He came to his own conscience and decided to go back to thank Jesus for what he had done. He knelt down at Jesus’ feet and worshipped him. Our text tells us that he “*turned back, and was praising God with a loud voice*.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Furthermore, this event also offered us a small glimpse of what the Kingdom of Heaven may look like. **Those who are considered the “chosen” ones were not defined based on their ancestry, but instead by their faith and what they believe in their hearts**. This was the core of Jesus’ message of salvation here on earth.

Whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, the Kingdom of God is available to ALL who embrace God’s grace and respond to God’s mercy. Who’s to say that gratitude and thanksgiving do not apply to those who may be different from us? Perhaps we have a lot to learn from them as well.

A theologian once said, **Gratitude is being GREAT with our Attitude.** Some people are perpetual whiners and complainers about anybody, anything, and at any time. But **gratitude is a virtue that we can all strive for…regardless of what circumstances that we might be in.** We ought to give thanks even when we have a bad day, when people drove you nuts, made you upset and angry, or falsely accused you of something that you didn’t do. We ought to give thanks when we receive bad test results from our teachers, so we can do better the next time. We give thanks for lives that we lived, for the lives that were abbreviated due to various illnesses or unexpected tragedy (natural or human-caused).

Yesterday I had the privilege of attending the funeral of Rev. Grace May’s mother. It was NOT a funeral but a celebration of life and witness of what her mother has done through her 93 years here on earth. We gave thanks for her life and the testimony that she gave to all those who came across her life as a devoted Christian and a mother. She has lived a life of gratitude, contentment, and joy even though her life was full of drama through the wars and the cultural revolution in China.

Last Sunday in our afternoon Bible Study, the themes of happiness and contentment also came up in our discussion. I mentioned that the country of Bhutan in central Asia claims a unique distinction of being the happiest place on earth…not Disney World! Not many people even know where Bhutan is on the map. It is a tiny country with a population of only 800,000 that shares border with China to the north with the Himalayas mountains as its backdrop and India to the south. According to a recent survey, 95% of the people there are happy because they don’t have to worry about many of the things that the rest of us have to we to worry about, being in a mostly agricultural farming based community surrounded by nature that has pretty much kept in its pristine condition. **Much of their state of happiness, contentment, and thankfulness can be attributed to their traditional Buddhist beliefs.** They just accept life for what it is and take things as they come. Life is good! Life is good everyday no matter what happens! That’s the right attitude!!!

When Jesus called out to the grateful Samaritan leper, true healing and transformation took place in his heart. ***“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well!”*** The grateful leper was touched by God’s grace and remembered to return gratitude when gratitude is due. In this case, this leper had now been set FREE, not only free from his debilitating disease, but FREE from being ostracized by the rest of society. Those words of liberation from Jesus were just as powerful than the physical healing itself. His faith has made him well. The soul of that gracious and humbled Samaritan has now been healed and he was fully embraced into the Kingdom of God.5

I have a friend who is a pastor from another denomination. Over the past few years, he has developed this passion on those non-believers in China. My friend Peter (whom we will call him today!) has visited China numerous times at the invitation by some of the connections that he has developed over the years. Every time he went to the remote villages in China, the people, especially the young people, would come out to hear him speak because they yearned to hear about message of hope and salvation and stories from the Bible.

Amazingly, God mobilized the hearts of many of these young people to come to faith through the preaching of the Word. My friend did not want to take any credit for the work that he did. He simply attributed everything to the work of the Holy Spirit. He did, however, have to be extremely careful, not to draw too much attention and attract a crowd, or else he might risk being questioned or even jailed by the authority and losing his visa of returning back to China ever again. As a result, my friend would only meet with a small group of people at a time.

As my friend shared with me, one evening, one of the girls came to the small group bible study with a heavy burden in her heart. They knew right away that something was not right…something was bothering her deep in her heart. She shared with the group how she was experiencing problems in her relationship with her parents and they were planning to disown her and kick her out of the house. She even contemplated suicide, but every time she tried, she wouldn’t have the guts to follow through. When she heard my friend sharing the message of hope through the gospel, this woman totally broke down emotionally and asked if my friend could pray for her….and he did.

At the end of the night, this woman got down on her knees and my friend would lead her into prayer confessing her sins before God, even the sin of thinking about ending her own life. She accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior and was baptized right there and then. Like the Samaritan leper who came back to thank Jesus, she had responded to God’s grace with conviction and faith...and surely her faith has made her well. She went out that evening celebrating and rejoicing and telling others how she has been saved by Christ and that she now has a new life to live for.

This woman realized that she was now a changed person. A heavy burden has been lifted off of her shoulder. She could no longer be held bondage by what this world offers or the values and expectation that she must live up to, because she has found true freedom in Christ. She was no longer an outcast looking in but a fellow believer of Christ looking out…looking out for others who might also be struggling with their faith and their emotion as well. The old is gone, and the new has come.

In the same way, through God’s grace our lives have also been intervened by God in order to make Himself known to us. Whenever we’ve gone astray, God has beckoned us to come back to him, but do we take time to listen or to acknowledge God’s work in our lives? Or are we too busy taking matters into our own hands, taking credits for God’s works in our lives?

**Through our own self-awareness and recognition, we not only come to realize our physically illness but perhaps our emotionally and spiritually illnesses as well.** We’ve been healed through God’s grace and mercy. Nine of those ten lepers keep going about their business on their own way but only one returned….or perhaps 9 out of 10 times, WE have failed to come back and thank God for what God has done in our lives.

As we prepare room in our hearts to receive Him in the coming weeks, we ask ourselves “have we brought enough oil for our lamps for the coming of the bridegroom in the unexpected hours. in the unexpected places? Are we willing to let God heal us, transform us and renew us in our lives? These are the heart-felt questions that we must ask ourselves as we enter the season of Advent in the weeks ahead.

So before we carve our turkey to celebrate the American cultural Thanksgiving this week, let us also remember our spiritual Thanksgiving feast that Christ has prepared for us at the Lord’s table. We remember those who might have been left out of the table (whether intentionally or unintentionally). We have the responsibilities to extend God’s invitation to this Thanksgiving feast that our Lord has prepared for ALL of God’s children, not just among the elite and chosen.

**Who and where are those who are in need to be healed today? When it comes to grace, gratitude, and thanksgiving, there’s always room for more at the Table. So, let us celebrate and feast at the Lord’s abundance of blessings, as we lift up our hearts full of thanksgiving.**

In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Luke 17:15* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)