

November 26 – “The Great Forget”

The story of the 10 Lepers

Special Music: “Take A Little Time” Andre Crouch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daKdrp7tCi8>



Luke 17:11-19

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance

13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

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

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”

18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”

19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

REVISITING REGRET

Covered in disgrace and pain
I called out my Creator's name
And begged him for compassion
On such a wretch as I,
Eating soured humble pie
My bones so brittle, my face so ashen

I allowed myself no expectations,
No ablation of the merciless crustations
That clung to both my body and soul.
To me, this was my final chance
As I took a stalwart stance
And begged the Lord to make me whole.

The Lord looked down and saw my pain
And yet I felt I begged in vain,
For not even God would touch my wretched skin
But to my very great surprise
Jesus looked into my eyes
And healed this dirty, filthy Bedouin.

And so, I left him to tell the people all
Of how God healed me from my fall
And made me clean and whole again.
From there I went on to live my life,
My skin no longer burned with strife
For God had healed my cursed skin.

**Then one day I passed away.
I found myself at heaven's gate,
Overwhelmed and filled with joy.
For here I stood before my God
Expecting angels to applaud
But they only acted as if annoyed.**

**I pondered how this could be
As I looked back on my history
And realized why the angels felt this way.
Although grateful that my Lord had healed me
I never returned to swear my fealty
And thank Christ for his mercy on that life-changing day.**

**How could I forget and live to regret
The very day that our eyes had met,
Remembering now what he had done that day?
I hung my head in senseless shame,
And once again called on my Creator's name
And asked for forgiveness for my shameful ways.**

**God looked at me with grace-filled eyes
Knowing I offered no alibis,
Just a sense of deep regret
Then God took me to his chest
And I realized just how much I'm blessed
To know that God loves me even yet.**

Have you ever been so caught up in a blessing that you are so overwhelmed, you forget to be thankful? I'm not talking about gratitude. We can feel gratitude without expressing thanks for our blessing. But that is a pretty short-sighted way of living life, being so grateful that we forget to give thanks to the provider of the moment, of the gift, of the treasure. I'm sure we have all experienced it at some point in our lives. And I ask you to not be too hard on yourselves as you think back on that moment. It may have been that Christmas when you got just what you wanted and just couldn't take time to say thank you before you went to use it, ride it, or play with it. Only to realize later that you have never thanked the giver of the gift.

And then one day, the giver of the gift is no longer with you, and you have lost your chance to express your gratitude. You only remember that you never thanked them for that moment in your life. And now it is too late. That is when the regret sets in. It would have been so simple to be thankful in the moment. I've never known anyone who lived to regret saying, "Thank you."

I've lived those moments just like everyone else. My parents made so many sacrifices for me and my sister. And although I tried to let them know how much I loved them, I don't think I ever let them know how very grateful I was for their sacrifices. I thought I had more time. I thought they would live long lives and I would have ample opportunities. I didn't realize that I needed to make the time before time ran out. If you think that it is difficult to find time to be graciously thankful for all the people who have touched your life, I am telling you

that it is much more difficult to live with unrequited regret than to utter the simple words, “Thank you.”

Jesus is traveling on a road that sits between Galilee and Samaria. The Bible does not tell us if his disciples are with him. But this seems like an intimate moment between Jesus and these ten lepers.

It is important for us to note that this group of lepers was a mixed lot. Samaritans and Jews despised one another. They certainly didn’t normally travel together. But that is the thing about becoming a member of an ostracized group. While the Jews and Samaritans despised one another, both groups despised lepers even more. During this time, when one developed leprosy they were often shunned by their communities. To combat the extreme loneliness that came from being rejected by one’s own relatives, friends, and communities, lepers would gather together into their own communal relationships, much like the homeless communities that we find today. Just as they were not accepted by their own communities, the law required that they separate themselves from the non-cursed. This dynamic was for their own protection as well as engaging with other people who were non-afflicted.

As Jesus enters the village, this group of ten lepers, a mixture of Samaritans and Jews, comes out to meet him. They remain at a distance from Jesus. This is not out of respect. Lepers were expected to remain at a distance from everyone else for fear of infection. To not remain at a distance could get them killed by the authorities or the local people. So, there was also an element of fear that played into this moment. Jesus could have just avoided them, and no

one would have thought the less of him. The lepers were used to being ignored and avoided. But they did call out to Jesus saying, **“Master, have pity on us.”**

Now, I may be reading too much into this, but normally when someone asks for pity, they are looking for recompense of some sort, perhaps a handout. That’s how lepers met their daily needs. They weren’t allowed to work with others, so begging was often the only choice they had to feed themselves each day.

But Jesus doesn’t offer them money. As a matter of fact, he doesn’t offer them anything. Instead, he responds with this, **“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”** Although we can’t see their reaction, this has to be somewhat confusing to the lepers. They were not used to interacting with people, including priests. As a matter of fact, a priest would most often ignore them or ward them off.

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? Both the priest and the religious leader ignored the man on the road, and he wasn’t even a leper. It’s a sad statement on society that this would happen, but it is one of the things Jesus came to change.

Still, Jesus doesn’t approach the lepers, but instead sends them off to show themselves to the priests. When they find the priests and present themselves, they find that they have been cleansed. I need you to remember that the lepers never asked to be cleansed. They asked for pity, probably expecting alms. But what they got instead was what they needed most, healing. Sometimes what we ask from God not what we need, but what we want. But in

response, he may give us what we need instead of what we want. Sometimes we ask God for something small only to have God gift us with something so huge we have a hard time wrapping our heads around it. And sometimes, it is so different from what we asked for, we don't even recognize it for the blessing that we actually need.

Do you remember the old saying, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." That is what Jesus is doing here. He could have given these lepers some food or some money, and they would probably have been happy. But instead, he gave them something far more precious. And I am not talking about the relief from the pain of leprosy. While they are healed of their afflictions, it is more important to note that they are now presented with an opportunity to reintegrate with society and make a living for themselves once again.

This was a life-changing experience. It was as big of a moment as when they were first cast out of society when they became lepers. They suddenly find themselves living inside of a much better miracle than they ever intended. And in their euphoria, they forgot the source of this life-changing occurrence. It's as if they completely forgot that it was Jesus who had done this for them.

Only one of them, one of the Samaritans, came to his senses and remembered Jesus in this time of blessing. One out of ten. Those are important odds to think about. How do we react if only one in ten people that we help comes back to thank us? Does it affect our willingness to help others? If one of those ten people turns to drugs to escape their lives, does that cause us to not

help others? If one of those ten people goes on to commit a crime, does that change the way we react to the next time we are presented with the opportunity to help someone in need? If we reach out to someone who is begging for help on a street corner, and we stop to help them, but the next day we find them doing the very same thing on the very same street corner, does that affect our desire to help them? Or does our instinct to sit in judgement interfere with our generosity? Did Jesus stop healing people because only one out of ten of the afflicted returned to thank him? Do we believe that the next time Jesus encountered someone needing healing, he just passed them by assuming that they would not be grateful if he did stop and help? Aren't we called to see people the way that Jesus sees people? Aren't we called to lift people even if we do not agree with their choices? Do we honestly believe that Jesus only helped those who deserved to be helped? Do we honestly believe that Jesus only helps those who help themselves? To believe that goes against the very nature of the love, grace, and mercy taught and exemplified by our Lord.

There are so many people that we can bless and bring closer to our God if we just stop looking for people who deserve our help. The world is full of broken people, relatives, friends, and strangers, that need to be lifted. And yes, nine out of ten of those people will never bother to thank us. It's really not about the poor choices that others make. It's about the beat of our own heart as we reach out into our community. Do people make poor choices? Of course, they do. I know that I have made more than my fair share and I am pretty sure that goes for the rest of us as well. Should people make better choices? Of course, they should.

It's tough to help people when we know that they have made bad choices. But it is not up to them to expect us to live out our Christian values. No, that is on us. It is our choice to help them through the grace of our Lord as we strive to meet the needs of people we find struggling. Our gift to God is to help others without passing judgement, just as Jesus helps us without condemning us for our sins.

“For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved.” John 3:17

I, for one, hate it when God finds me stiff-necked, obstinate, and selfish. While it is built into my nature as a human being, God fully expects me, with Jesus' help, to rise above that nature and conquer that selfish spirit, to embrace more fully the love, grace, and mercy exemplified by my Lord Jesus Christ. And yes, just like every other human on the planet, there are times when I totally fail as a Christian. I find it a glorious thing, that my Lord and Savior can see beyond my faults and still loves me enough to allow me to continue to serve him with the opportunities that he places in my path.

Jesus knew that only one of the lepers would return to thank him. He also knew that it would be one of the Samaritans, a foreigner. But that did not prevent him from healing the other nine.

I know that as we come into the Christmas season, we can become somewhat conflicted. We're in the spirit and we want to help. There's the Salvation Army caldron, the travelers in trouble, El Buen Vecino, our own First Christian Church, The Disciples of Week of Compassion, and so many more

organizations asking for help. I get tons of charity requests from around the world, and I truly wish I could help everyone. In times like this, we need to open our hearts to give what and where we can. The sheer enormity of the need should not shut down the nature of our Christ given generosity.

Everywhere he went, Jesus was expected to give of himself to those around him. Even when it was overwhelming. And there were many people who followed him seeking to receive that which he offered freely. Can there ever be enough time, energy, or finances to meet all the needs we encounter? No. We are, after all, only human. But we should never use that as an excuse not to give when the opportunity arises. Neither should we base our giving on our own judgmental attitudes, but on the validity of the need.

An attitude of Reluctant Gratitude becomes a breeding ground for Reluctant Generosity, Reluctant Forgiveness, Reluctant Mercy, Reluctant Grace, and even Reluctant Love. God has never called us to a life of Reluctant Gratitude. We are called to step into gratitude with the same joy and love that Jesus steps into our lives to nurture us.

This week, I want us to all ponder the generosity in our hearts as we rely on the generosity that Christ has shown us each and every day. Let us be generous throughout the season whenever we can. Let us give from our hearts and souls of compassion and grace. And let us never forget that we need to continue to thank God for all that we have. And we need to thank God for the opportunities that he provides for us to share his generosity with the world.

16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”

18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”

19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

God bless you all!

AMEN

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