

Nine Ungrateful Turkeys  
Luke 17:11-19  
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As far as high school graduation speeches go, most are pretty uninteresting. For the most part, what you will hear is a smattering of encouraging clichés and platitudes about unlimited potential, the world is your oyster, shoot for the stars, O the places you'll go. They sing about self esteem and proclaim that anything can happen. Which is why when I heard about the speech given by the English teacher David McCollough Jr at the Wellsley High School graduation in Massachusetts, I gave listen. With the class of 2013 seated in front of him, parents and grandparents sitting proudly behind them, filled with anticipation, we aghast when the speaker began his speech by saying "YOU ARE NOT SPECIAL."

And he went on to say this, "You've been pampered, cosseted, doted upon and bubble wrapped. Yes, capable adults with other things to do have held you kissed you, wiped your mouth, trained you, taught you, tutored you, counseled you, encouraged you, consoled you, and encouraged you again. You've been fatted and fawned over and called Sweetie Pie. But do not get the idea that you are anything special, 'cause you're not. The fulfilling life, the distinctive life, the relevant life is an achievement, not something that can fall into your lap or be ordered for you from the caterer by mommy. You'll note that the founding fathers too great pains to secure your inalienable rights, the right to life liberty and pursuit of happiness, quite an active verb, pursuit. Which leaves, I should think, precious little time for lying around and watching YouTube videos of parrots roller-skating. "

And the people of God said....AMEN!

As you can imagine, this speech became an instant phenomenon, and it became a rant against the entitlement mentality that says everyone who tries gets a trophy and everyone who runs gets a ribbon. This makes me sick! Our over-worked, over-hyped, over-structured, over-caffeinated, over-stimulated culture has created an entitlement mentality. And this entitlement epidemic doesn't so much need to be explained in this sermon, as it needs to be named and cast out like the demon that it is.

But as the Scriptures say in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun, and even this has been around since the Garden and also rears its ugly head in the time of Jesus, because it has everything to do with our fallen nature as individuals. And the only thing that can combat the plague of self-centeredness is the promise that the genuine life Jesus offers in the Gospel comes not when we are the center, but when others are the center, and when gratitude and thankfulness replace arrogance and me-centeredness.

This is our last sermon in this series in which we've looked at the prayers of God's people, and this morning I can't think of a better place to end than with the words of the Psalmist that Charlie just read for us, that proclaim the all surpassing, never-ending love

of God that is shown particularly to each of us individually, and the simple expression of gratitude that reminds us that *while God's love is uniquely for us, it is not just for us*. So I invite you to turn with me to Luke's Gospel as we conclude this series on prayer, to Luke chapter 17, and as you are able rise with me in honor of God's Word and listen to the Word of the Lord.

**On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."**

Jesus is on his way Jerusalem from his hometown region of Galilee. But in order to get from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus would need to pass through the region called Samaria. Notice that the text implies passing *through* Samaria, not around it, and this is important because Jews, people of the region of Judea, hated Samaritans. They considered them less than, half-breeds, traitors. In fact, one scholar writes that the word used for Samaritans in this day was the same word for foreigner, not someone who is just a little different in their homeland, but foreigner refers to someone outside the practice of Judaism—they were unholy and unworthy. And so the fact that Jesus passes through Samaria is critical to our text.

And as he was passing, he was met at a distance by a group of lepers. Leprosy, as you may already know, was a disease that in first century Palestine would have gotten you sequestered into camps outside the city. Clearly these guys don't have a lot going for them. So Jesus is walking along and then off in the distance he hears: **"Jesus, master, have mercy on us."**

And Jesus says to them **"Go and show yourselves to the priests."** And so all ten lepers head back to their home towns, to their local priest who was not just the local minister, but was also a public health representative, because only he could determine when a diseased person was deemed well enough to return to their community. So these 10 lepers go, and along the way, they are all miraculously cured, but only one of them comes back to say thank you.

The psalmist today from whom Charlie read begins by saying, "Give thanks to God for his goodness," and then goes on to lay out multiple scenarios where someone is in a sticky situation, not unlike our 10 leprous friends. Some wandered in desert wastelands, some sat in darkness in the shadow of death (maybe in a prison cell, or even in a nursing home with none to visit). Some were foolish in their sinful ways. But all of them have one thing in common: they all cry out to the Lord, they all pray. We've covered this ground already. There are times in our lives when we are stuck, or we're trapped, or

we're afflicted with something from which we can't free ourselves and so we cry out. The second movement is what God does. In each case, the psalmist says God intervenes miraculously and delivers and heals his people. And then the psalmist tells us how in times like this we are to respond. He says, "LET THE REDEEMED OF THE LORD...SAY SO!" Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry he fills with good things.

Author Anne Lamott says that there are really only two kinds of prayers. There are the "help me, help me, help me, help me" prayers and the "thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you" prayers. And what I think this story is really telling us is that there are a whole lot more people out there saying the "help me, help me, help me, help me" prayers than there are saying the "thank you, thank you, thank you" prayers.

The ten lepers were obedient to Jesus but only one was said to have faith. Ten lepers were healed, but only one was saved. Ten set out the claim their gift, but only one returned to give thanks. Ten lived responsibly, but only one lived with doxology. So Jesus says to this man, **"Were not all ten men cleansed, where are the other nine?"** We don't get it in the English Translation, but it's there in the original Greek. Jesus says "Where are those ungrateful turkeys?"

And then he continues in verse 18, "Has no one returned to give praise but this foreigner?" What he's saying, in a sense, is that this foreigner, this Samaritan is more Jewish than the Jews, because only he came back to return thanks. And beneath this text I think is a profound lesson for us: the 9 other lepers who didn't come back acted out of a sense of entitlement. They were content to draw their identity from the ethnicity, their religious practices, their membership on the rolls of their local synagogue. But by not coming back to the source itself, it exposes what they really believe. That God owed them one.

Let's be real, these lepers, like us, can do nothing to earn or deserve or merit the goodness of his grace. And yet in actuality, many of us believe that God owes us something. We believe that God should answer our prayers, or rescue us when we ask. When we hear the words "blessed are the poor in spirit," we hear "blessed are the middle class in spirit," because we believe God ought to hear us because we've earned it.

And this, I believe, is where the disease of the Self-Esteem movement has infiltrated the Christian faith. Be real with me for a moment. Is there any part of you that secretly thinks that God owes you something? Because if there is, this is precisely the point at which we have descended into the deep dark pit of Spiritual Entitlement. GK Chesterton has this wonderful quote when he says the praise of God stands on its strongest ground when it stands on nothing at all.

The most important litmus test for the wellbeing of our faith is the frequency and the willingness to be thankful. And I'm not talking about just an attitude of gratitude, as if it's just something we can conjure up with feelings. Thankfulness is not just a feeling. Notice that in our text and elsewhere in the Scriptures the expression of thankfulness is

always preceded by what word? Give. There's a verb that comes before thanksgiving, and it's always active, it's always something we do. In the same way, happiness is not just a given feeling, promised in our founding documents. It is something to be pursued. Gratitude is always expressed by a response.

There is a word that many of you will be familiar with it is the word Eucharist, in Greek it literally means GOOD GRACE, Eu-good and Charis-Grace. This word is used 37 times in the New Testament, and all 37 times it is used to express the Good Grace of God, but here, this one leper returns his gratitude for the Eucharist Jesus offered to him because he knew that with Jesus, he was in the presence of the living God.

A writer by the name of Ann Voskamp tells the story in her book *One Thousand Gifts* of watching her younger sister innocently chase a cat through their front yard only to accidentally venture out into the street where she was struck and killed by a truck. And she remembers standing by the porch window pressing her face against the cold glass as her parents knelt beside her sister's body, crumpled on the road covered with a blanket soaked in blood. Too much blood. And she tells of how from that point on, the door to faith was shut in her home. Her mother checked herself into a psychiatric hospital and her father abandoned his belief in a good God. The only way that Ann would continue was because neighbors picked her up each and every week to take her.

Decades later, Ann now has a family of her own, with a husband and kids. And to help in the healing, still dealing with, Ann thought about what she could do. And the idea came to her to make a list of a thousand things she was thankful for. She did it in order to prevent herself from slipping into generic platitudes of "just cultivate an attitude of gratitude." And if she was going to do this, if she was going to come up with a list this big, it would need to be specific, so she includes things like: morning shadows on wooden floors, jam piled high on toast, the cry of the blue jay coming from the top of the spruce, the leafy life scent coming from the floral shop, old creaky knees, the aroma of fresh cut straw, the sound of crackling of fire, still warm chocolate chip cookies.

And as she began to make this list, the amazing thing happened: she began to pray for the first time in a long time, in a sincere way. She began, through this series of thankfulnesses, to return to the giver of the gifts. And the giver slowly began to heal the wound of her sister's death. And in one place in the book, she brilliantly and poetically says these words.

"From all our beginnings, we keep reliving the Garden story. Satan, he wanted more. More power, more glory. Ultimately in his essence Satan is an ingrate. And he sinks his venom into the heart of Eden. Satan's sin becomes the first sin of all humanity: the sin of ingratitude. Adam and Eve are, simply, painfully, ungrateful for what God gave. Isn't that the catalyst of all my sins? Our fall was, has always been, and always will be, that we aren't satisfied in God and what He gives. We hunger for something more, something other."

We cannot be grateful for what we do not have, which is why we need to embrace what we do have. Gratitude cannot breathe in the air of entitlement, and being chronically dissatisfied with what we have robs us of the ability to be grateful for what we do have. We need to hear this very clearly this morning, God owes us nothing! Which is how we are then able to stand up and recognize the true gift of that which we do have.

So as the psalmist says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

IF God has:

Given you the gift of job that pays the bills

Given you family who will love you in all your idiosyncrasies

Released you from the bondage of wanting more, working more, indulging more, injecting more.

IF God's Word has taken root in your heart and you have received the healing work of God's forgiveness that flows down from Cavalry.

Say so.

And come to him with all your might and give him the only thing that is really required of a life that has been rescued: "thank you." All ten lepers were healed that day, but only one drew near. Only one realized that he could not only be healed, but he could be near the Savior. And the only thing that can truly bring people together is Eucharist

Nobody is special without Jesus Christ. Only those who humble themselves are exalted, and only those who fall at his feet are lifted up and rise to resurrection life with the Savior. Worship him today, church. Give thanks, and for heaven's sake, let the redeemed of the Lord say so!