

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

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Worship This Week Oct. 13, 2024

SCRIPTURE INTRO – Thankfulness is more than just the right thing to do. It's tied to emotional and mental health. It also has spiritual implications. I'm going to share two well-known Biblical passages – each of which sheds light on the importance of being grateful.

SCRIPTURE – Luke 17:11-19

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."

MESSAGE – It's tempting to dismiss this story as completely irrelevant. No one has leprosy, at least not in North America. The story also seems far fetched. If you had a horrible flesh-eating disease that made you an outcast and you were suddenly healed, of course you would be thankful. The obvious lesson is that we need to be thankful. But the lesson here is deeper. Here's where it's useful to pay attention to the words. When Jesus told them to present themselves to the priests, it was a strange request because there was no way a priest was going to see them in their condition. But they went anyway, and they were "cleansed" on the way. The healing took place because they had faith. They called out to Jesus because they knew He could heal. As Luke writes, they were cleansed. But this was only superficial or physical. The one who returned to give thanks was made "well." There's a difference. The words might appear to mean the same thing, but the implications are deeper. "Made well" implies spiritual cleansing. When someone gives their life to Christ their soul is washed and they are saved. God rescues believers from the penalty and power of sin and delivers them into His Kingdom. That's exactly what happened to this one man who returned. The difference is gratitude. God does many things for us. And we don't have to be believers to

enjoy his protection. In Matthew 5:45 we are reminded that God “gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.” How many of us just take that for granted? When we are grateful, we can enter into a deeper walk of faith. Thank God for his mercy toward us. Jesus did not say, “If the nine men aren’t thankful, let them be plagued with leprosy once again!” But it did hurt Him, because ingratitude to God is the first step toward backsliding and departure from God. So what happened to the other nine – why didn’t they return? Maybe they were too busy celebrating their healing with their respective families. That is completely understandable, as they had been outcasts and living in pain. The nine who did not return were likely so caught up in the momentous freedom from pain and suffering that they wanted to dive back into life and make up for lost time. They had to find new clothing, jobs and reintegrate into society. While all of this is natural, it’s also selfish. We are a naturally egocentric bunch. The nine who didn’t return may have been filled with pride because they knew that their faith had healed them. They obeyed The Lord’s command and presented themselves. It’s a two-step program. But again, they missed something extremely important: gratitude.

We are naturally selfish. It’s the way we are wired. We are naturally sinful beings. That’s why all the good deeds in the world aren’t going to save us. Only Jesus saves us when we choose to believe in Him and his death and resurrection. Part of the process of becoming more like Christ (sanctification) is the realization that in order to grow spiritually, we need to be focused more on what God wants than what we want. The problem with many churches today is that they are too focused on what God can do for us. They are preoccupied with our desire to reach our full human potential and to do what is natural to us, rather than stop and ask “Is my lifestyle about God or is it more about me?” This leads to the second scripture on thankfulness.

SCRIPTURE – Romans 1:16-24

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” 18 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. 19 They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. 21 Yes,

they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. 22 Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. 23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.

MESSAGE – Paul points to the wonders of creation: “the earth and sky.” It’s a beautiful planet with amazing wildlife, stunning sunsets and the quiet beauty of a starry night. Many people comment on how God’s hands were at work when all of this was created. When seeing something beautiful, my late mom would say, “How can anyone say there is no God when they see something this beautiful.” Even people who don’t have an active faith life can say this. More than just the environment, we can sometimes see the image of God in other people, when strangers come to our assistance and want nothing in return. Or just experiencing unconditional love from a parent or grandparent or some trusted person. Everyone has had some exposure to the beauty of creation and other people. And yet not everyone responds in faith. Paul says “Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship Him as God or even give him thanks.” They don’t take it to the next level. They were too focused on themselves.

As a result, their minds became dark and confused. They were all about themselves. Sounds a lot like today’s self-centred culture, but this was written 2,000 years ago. Human nature has not changed – only the music and technology. The result is something pretty grim: abandonment. “God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.”

Someone might say, “I thought God loves us.” Isn’t that what the church always says. Yes, God does love every person who was created in His image. But that person wants nothing to do with the Creator and thinks they can do it alone, God has a choice. He can continue to tap people on the shoulder, or nudge them or even bodycheck them if that’s his will. Sometimes, you need to talk away in the hope they will discover the truth. It’s a lot like being a parent. Children who leave home in every sense of the world and go down the wrong path – parents will do what they can but after a while, any attempt at intervention may even do more harm than good and push them away further. So you throw up your hands and walk away. But you never stop loving them. God has said and continues to say to many people in this world, “fine, have it your way – see how that works out for you.” And we hope they hear the wakeup call, come to their senses and answer.

Jesus said: “The world’s sin is that it refuses to believe in me” (John 16:9). When we truly believe, one of the first things we do is give thanks. The more we appreciate God and want to please Him by seeking His perfect will, the more peace we will feel, the more our spirits will be open to receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. And it all starts when we realize that life is not about what I want but is about what God wants – for us as believers, for families, for churches and for the nations. Amen