

Wednesday March 17th: The Man healed of Leprosy: [Luke 17:11-19](#):

'Were not all ten cleansed?'

These days a journey from Samaria to Galilee would entail crossing the wall separating the Palestinian West Bank from Israel, something that many Palestinians are unable to do. For safety reasons pilgrims travelling from Jerusalem to Galilee have to drive east down to Jericho, near to the border with Jordan, and then turn north rather than take a more direct route.



Graffiti on Security Wall separating Israel from the West Bank

Even back in the time of Jesus it wasn't a safe place; the bitter and lasting hatred that could be traced all the way back to the division of Israel into two

separate kingdoms over nine hundred years previously meant that this border area was a risky place to be travelling (the context for the Parable of the Good Samaritan). The best part of a thousand years is a very long time to be bearing grudges!

There is a clear link back in this story to Jesus's earlier parable (Luke 10 v 25 37) because in both cases the unexpected hero is a Samaritan. In Jesus' parable a member of that community goes to enormous lengths to care for a half dead Jewish man who was supposed to be his sworn enemy and in the real world setting of our passage the only one of ten men healed of leprosy who bothers to come back to thank Jesus is a Samaritan (v 16). This means we have to consider this passage from two different perspectives.

Firstly and most obviously it is about the need to be thankful. We can imagine all ten of those healed by Jesus being caught up in the excitement of being able to return to their families after months, if not years, of exclusion and isolation. The impact of this on their mental health is reflected in the intensity of their pleas for restoration (v 12). And all ten are healed; their healing is not dependent on their returning to give thanks and leprosy does not flare up again because they went straight home. This healing is an act of unconditional love and, as such, is done freely. The fact that it doesn't seem to have led to spectacular spiritual growth for all but one of the ten might make us doubt their faith. Yet Jesus makes it quite clear that faith did indeed play a key role in the healing (v 19), something which must surely have applied equally to the absent nine. Perhaps it was just that in the excitement of the moment and the rush to get home they simply forgot to come back and say thank you. It may even be that some of them regretted their omission later but felt that the moment had passed. Sometimes when you mean to contact a friend you haven't been in touch with for a while or write a thank you note to somebody who has helped you the longer you leave it the harder it becomes to actually do it. 'Do it now or don't do it all' is often the way it goes. Their faith may not have been as great as the Samaritan but even a small amount of faith in Jesus can apparently make a difference, something I personally find greatly comforting.

The point for us here is that true thankfulness always includes a response. In the case of this Samaritan, it meant coming back to Jesus to let him know how much what was done for him was appreciated. Many people who volunteer to work for charitable organisations such as hospices, mental health charities, cancer care centres and churches do so because they themselves received help when they really needed it and want to give something back as a way of saying thank you.

There were a number of cases over the years I was involved in running the Alpha Course when people who had done the course subsequently became involved as leaders and helpers. Other people give financially to charities that have helped them in a difficult time which is another important way of saying thank you. The Holy Communion service is sometimes called 'The Eucharist' which derives from the Greek word 'eucharistia' meaning 'thanksgiving'. This means that at the heart of Christian worship is an act of thankfulness for all that Jesus has done for us. Again and again we share bread and wine, tokens of his broken and pierced body, in thankful remembrance of God's gracious and reconciling love. One significant reason Jesus left us this meal was that we would never take for granted the sacrifice that he made for us; each time the drama of the crucifixion is made real for us in bread and wine it is a reminder that it was for us and for all. Then at the end of the service we are sent out to 'live and work to his praise and glory' or to put it another way, to express our thankfulness to God in the way we serve him day by day. It's why James says that without 'works' (which, for him, very much includes caring for those in need – James 2 v 14-17) faith is moribund (James 2 v 26).

Secondly, we need to consider the implications of the Samaritan being the hero of the story. It's interesting that in calling him a foreigner (v 18) Jesus identifies himself with the Jewish race. He doesn't do this in a narrow nationalistic sense, I think, but to emphasise the omission of the other nine, who we assume to be Jewish, in failing to come back. In affirming the faith of a Samaritan Jesus is actually being counter cultural and ground breaking. We have to wait until Acts 10, when Peter is shown a vision and sent to the house of Cornelius, a gentile Roman Centurion, to find him and his fellow believers beginning to tumble to the fact that, as he puts it, '...God does not show favouritism...' (Acts 10 v 34). Convincing his Jewish followers that God wanted to bless Gentiles as well was always going to be a tough nut for Jesus to crack. Our own age is one in which nationalism, factionalism and populism are once again raising their ugly heads and triggering conflicts in places such as Nagorno Karabakh, Ukraine, Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria, South Sudan and Myanmar. The suffering this has caused to the many victims who have been killed, maimed, bereaved and forced to leave the communities they have lived in their whole lives is such that we often can't bear to look. Many other regions and individual countries are becoming bitterly divided along ethnic or political grounds – the United Kingdom and the United States of America are two good examples of where this kind of division is on the increase. The message of Jesus Christ is that we have a fundamental unity rooted in the fact that Jesus died for all regardless of race or ethnicity. This grateful Samaritan is a signpost pointing us to truths that transcend the divisions that scar our beautiful world reminding us that love, the self-giving love that we see in Jesus, must and will win the day because the risen Christ has triumphed over hate in all its forms and invited us to be citizens of an eternal kingdom of love, life and peace.

Questions: What do you need to say thank you to God for today? In what ways should living with a thankful heart shape our lives?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for all that you have done for us. Help us never to take you for granted and to respond in the giving of our lives to your service. Amen.