

Matthew 8:1-4 (CEB)

Now when Jesus had come down from the mountain, large crowds followed him. ² A man with a skin disease came, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, if you want, you can make me clean."

³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do want to. Become clean." Instantly his skin disease was cleansed. ⁴ Jesus said to him, "Don't say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them."

Luke 17:11-19 (CEB)

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him. Keeping their distance from him, ¹³ they raised their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, show us mercy!"

¹⁴ When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they left, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."

Why do you give?

It is a simple story. Jesus comes down from a mountain where, presumably, he had been praying and spending some time with the Father. As usual large crowds flocked to him and among them was a leper.¹ The man came up to Jesus and knelt before him, reminding Jesus that he can heal the leper of his disease if he so chooses. Jesus does choose to do so. Jesus stretched out his hand, touched the man, and he was made clean. Instantly, the skin disease disappeared. Jesus told the man to go keep quiet about what had happened. He was to show himself to the priests, make the appropriate offering for the healing, all as a witness.

The second story is also pretty straightforward, even as it consists of two parts. Ten lepers are hanging out together one day as Jesus makes his way through northern Samaria. Evidently, they recognize Jesus as he approaches, and they know of his reputation as a healer. Quickly, they begin to plead for mercy, for healing. And why shouldn't they? What other hope do they have? And, not surprisingly, Jesus responds to their pleas with the mercy they seek. He treats them as if they had already been healed, telling them to go show themselves to a priest, as required by the Law. So they head off directly, realizing that they had been healed. But one of them hangs back, praises God at the top of his lungs and throws himself on the ground in front of Jesus, thanking him over and over. What about the other nine?

Fred Craddock suggests that this second story has two parts. The first (v. 11-14) is a "typical" healing story. The second part (v. 15-19) is then the story of a foreigner's salvation. After all, what is a Samaritan doing in the bunch? For if they are not Jews, then why would Jesus send them to a priest? And the statement, "Your faith has made you well," could just as easily be translated, "Your faith has saved you." That would be even a more typical translation of the Greek root word, *sozo*. Thus, it is an outsider that *sees* and *understands* Jesus and the Kingdom of God better than do the insiders, the Jews.

¹Though the skin disease is usually translated as "leprosy," the Greek word here and elsewhere was used for a variety of skin diseases. Still, these ten people were outcasts not only because people feared their disease, but because people believed that their affliction was punishment for sins they or someone in their family had committed. Lepers kept to themselves, lived in colonies of their own, and lived near major thoroughfares so they could more easily beg for charity.

In this way, the second half of the story carries much the same punch as the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), for there it is the Samaritan outsider, not the priest and Levite, who knows the right answer to Jesus' question, "Who is my neighbor?" The healing of this Samaritan leper also has strong echoes of Elisha's healing of Naaman the foreign commander who had leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-17). Naaman too is not only healed of his affliction, but comes to know that Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, is the only god, the LORD God. Just as the Samaritan sees the truth about Jesus' kingdom announcement, so Naaman comes to see the truth of Elisha's ministry of life.

Alan Culpepper helps us grasp that there are really two questions here: What do we see? And just as importantly: What do we *do* when we see?

The second question goes to the heart of the story [of the ten lepers]. What do you *do* when you see? Jesus saw need and acted to meet it. When the leper saw healing, he did not just celebrate his good fortune; he returned to praise God and fall on his face before Jesus. Gratitude may be the purest measure of one's character and spiritual condition. The absence of the ability to be grateful reveals self-centeredness or the attitude that I deserve more than I ever get, so I do not need to be grateful.

Did it take a Samaritan—an outcast—to recognize grace for what it was? The grateful person reveals a humility of spirit and a sensitivity to love expressed by others. The grateful person, therefore, regards others' acts of kindness and experiences of God's grace with profound gratitude. Life itself is a gift. Health is a precious gift—the friendship of others and the love of family and special friends are an overwhelming grace to be treasured and guarded with gratitude. What do you see? And what do you do?

This story also challenges us to regard gratitude as an expression of faith. At the end, Jesus says to the Samaritan, "Your faith has made you well." That faith was expressed not primarily in the lepers' collective cry for help but in the Samaritan's individual act of recognition and his cry of grateful praise. Only his "loud voice" of praise matched the lepers' raised voices to call out for help at the beginning of the story.

In what sense, then, is gratitude an expression of faith? Does not gratitude follow from faith? Or is gratitude itself an expression of faith? If gratitude reveals humility of spirit and a sensitivity to the grace of God in one's life, then is there any better measure of faith than wonder and thankfulness before what one perceives as unmerited expressions of love and kindness from God and from others? Are we self-made individuals beholden to no one, or are we blessed daily in ways we seldom perceive, cannot repay, and for which we often fail to be grateful? Here is a barometer of spiritual health: If gratitude is not synonymous with faith, neither response to God is separable from the other. Faith, like gratitude, is our response to the grace of God as we have experienced it. For those who have become aware of God's grace, all of life is infused with a sense of gratitude, and each encounter becomes an opportunity to see and to respond in the spirit of the grateful leper.²

Why do I give?

That is a more challenging question than it might seem. And often in church we end up feeling like we can't talk about our own needs, that doing so is somehow selfish or mean-spirited. But, of course we have needs. The lepers in these stories had needs, foremost of which was getting cured of the disease that had plagued them for years, resulting in their ostracism by friends and neighbors. What did Jesus do in the face of this need? Professor Culpepper gets it right when he says, "Jesus saw need and acted to meet it." That is what Jesus did and still does. It is what Jesus wants us to do. We want to meet the needs of people we love -- before any requirements are set forth or qualifications are met.

So, of course, we can voice our needs. The lepers did, why wouldn't we? It is a good thing to give to the church so your kids have a place to come and learn about Jesus or so you have a choir to sing in or a group with whom you can study the Bible or simply a place where you

² Culpepper, R. A. (1994–2004). The Gospel of Luke. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 9, pp. 327–328). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

can make friends and find life-affirming fellowship. All these are good. They are not all there is to our life as Christians or as a church, by any means, but they are good and a fine place to start.

So why do any of us give? For lots of reasons I'm sure, but certainly because in some way our own needs are met, even as those needs are being reshaped by God through the transformation of our minds and hearts.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Why do you give? As you begin some deep reflection on this question, it would be good to remember God. . . . It seems so straight-forward, so easy. It is not. Sure, we might be able to say grace before meals and come to church each Sunday. But remembering God, as Moses spoke of it, meant centering one's life upon God, in all moments and in all places. I think that is what Paul means when he speaks of praying without ceasing. Paul knew that we can't spend our entire day on our knees, but he knew that for most of us, it can be hard to give God more than a passing thought during our busy days. You might begin your discussion or reflection by considering what it really means to be immersed in God, to center your life upon him. For example, it might mean seeing each person we meet as bearing the image of God – try that in the mall sometime! It might mean going into each business meeting asking yourself . . . what would God really want me to do in this meeting? You might also make a list of the major obstacles we face as we try to remember God in the “real world.”

Daily Bible Readings

More on giving thanks

Monday, Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 7:7-11 Remember God, always knowing that what we have is his gift to us.

Tuesday, Psalm 30 A psalm of Thanksgiving

Wednesday, Psalm 105 Another psalm of thanksgiving

Thursday, Thursday, Psalm 111 One of the great psalms of thanksgiving

Friday, Ezra 3:10-13 The people give thanks at the laying of the foundation for a new temple.

Saturday, 1 Thessalonians 1 Paul is always grateful to God for the faithfulness of the Thessalonian believers.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Acts.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: *The Virtues*