

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When Jesus saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus's feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Luke 17:11-19

10/12/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Stewardship I: Grateful"

Rev. Amy Terhune

I was to start this morning with a story that one of you all posted online. It's long, so I've shortened here. I don't know if it is factually accurate, but it communicates truth, which interests me more. It seems that a high school history teacher saw a good kid in the lunch line one day, and, from a distance, he watched as the lunch lady said something to the kid. "His shoulders slumped, and she handed him a tray with a simple sandwich - two pieces of white bread, two pieces of processed cheese, and a carton of milk. Other kids walked away with hot meals, and he walked away with a cold cheese sandwich. He writes, "He walked past his friends, eyes glued to the floor, and sat at an empty table at the far end of the cafeteria. He didn't eat. He just stared at the wall. In that moment, he wasn't a student. He was a statistic. His family's bank account balance was on public display, served between two slices of cheap bread. And something inside me snapped.

The next day, I walked into the main office before school. Linda, the cafeteria manager, was there sorting receipts. "Hey," she said, not looking up. "Don't tell me the coffee machine is broken again."

"It's fine, Linda," I said, sliding a folded fifty-dollar bill across the counter. "I want to start a fund. Anonymously. For the kids who come up short. When it happens, just... take it from this. Please, no more cheese sandwiches."

She finally looked up, her eyes lingering on my face. She didn't say a word. She just gave a slow, deliberate nod and tucked the bill into her apron.

I started doing it every paycheck. A fifty, sometimes a hundred, if I had a little extra. I called it the "Invisible Lunch Fund." Linda never mentioned it, but sometimes I'd see her give a real hot meal to a kid I knew was struggling, and she'd catch my eye from across the room with that same quiet nod. It was our secret conspiracy of decency.

Then, one afternoon, Sarah, the sharpest student in my AP History class, stayed after the bell. Nervously twisting the strap of her backpack, she confessed that she knew I gave money to help kids with lunches. She'd overheard the exchange while dropping a form off in the office. She wasn't angry or offended. Instead, her eyes shown brightly. She and her friends wanted to help.

The next Monday, a group of students from my AP class set up a bake sale in the main hall. The sign, hand-painted on poster board, read: "BAKE SALE FOR BENEDICT ARNOLDS. (Because betraying your friends by letting them go hungry at lunch is treason.)"

By lunchtime, they had a shoebox overflowing with crumpled bills and coins. They placed it on my desk without a word. Over four hundred dollars. The administration, to their credit, looked the other way. I'm retiring this year. The Invisible Lunch Fund is now just "The Fund," and it's run entirely by the students. They've made it their own.

For 38 years, I tried to teach kids that history is shaped by big speeches and epic battles. But I was wrong. It's about the quiet moments, the unspoken acts of grace, the moments where one person recognizes and honors the humanity of another – that is the kind of history that changes things for all of us. [9 ¶s adapted from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FmEDSVJrG/>]

Now that story didn't happen in Michigan. For now, at least, students in public school in Michigan get breakfast and lunch at no charge to the family. Somebody figured out that kids learn better when they're not hungry. But every year, we invariably get a snow day or two. And my kids would celebrate because they could stay home and take a day off. I celebrated too, because we close the office on snow days, and I'd get to spend the day with my kids. But after we came to Saginaw nine years ago, and I learned about the backpack program here that sends food home with kids on the weekend because hunger doesn't take the weekend off. And then I started to feel a little crunch in my stomach every time a snow day gets called because I know that somewhere out there within just a mile or two of my home, there's a kid who won't eat that day because they're not at school. I also know that staying home when you're sick is a luxury. Kids get sent to school when they're sick because the income their parents make reporting for their hourly shift makes the difference between whether the whole family eats the next week or not.

These are not things I would ever have thought about on my own. These are not experiences I personally have had to face. I learn about them from hearing another's story, from seeing the world through another's eyes. In his book *Who Needs God*, Rabbi Harold Kushner writes: "Religion is first and foremost a way of seeing. It can't change the facts about the world we live in, but it can change the way we see those facts, and that in itself can often make all the difference." [p.19 & 280-1; from Brian Stoffregen, Exegetical Notes, illustrations for Luke 17:11-19 on www.Sermons.com.]

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus heals 10 lepers. A wonderful miracle—a healing story of highest caliber. But it is clear that the healing is not the focus of the story. 10 are freed from leprosy, but only one learns to see differently. Let's look at the text for just a moment. Jesus is passing through the region between Galilee and Samaria—kind of a barren, wind-swept desert highway. He stumbles upon a village—probably just a collection of little mud-brick huts around a water source of some kind. There's a wall around the village and a few hundred villagers. Everyone knows each other. There's the village priest, the village baker, the village gossip, the village drunk—everyone has their role—and oh yeah, then there's the village trash. 10 lepers.

As required by law, they live outside the village wall, in a little dugout pit just for lepers. They must remain 50 feet from all clean folks. They can't work, can't be with their families, can't support themselves by any way but begging, so they put their cups along the side of the road and then gather at some invisible line 50 feet out and call out piteously to those who pass by or through town.

They are cut off from everyone and everything. Valued by no one, despised by everyone, a leper would never feel the caring touch of a spouse, the joy of playing with the kids, the significance of having meaningful labor or skills to contribute to society. Misery loves company, and they had only each other, which may perhaps explain why a Samaritan was among them when Jews and Samaritans normally hated each other.

They cry out to him, and Luke makes a point of noting that Jesus sees them. That's significant – seeing plays a role in this lesson. He recognizes them as children of God. He doesn't touch them, he doesn't pray over them, he doesn't spread salve on their sores or command the illness to come out of them. Instead, he instructs them to go and show themselves to the priest. Let the priest see the healing – another reference to sight. The priest will then declare them clean, thus enabling their return to life within the social order.

But pay very close attention here, folks. They're not healed yet. Jesus tells them to go to the priest before there's any evidence that healing is going to happen. They haven't seen anything yet. But to their credit, they go. All ten do exactly what Jesus tells them to do. All ten of them have enough trust to head for the synagogue. And the text is very clear. It says, "As they went, they were made clean." As they went,

their sores disappeared, their limbs grew stronger, their sensory perception returned. As they went, they saw their hopes and dreams emerging from the dust before their very eyes. They rejoiced and celebrated. As they went, the healing happened.

As they went. Friends, this is a recurring theme in the Bible, going all the way back to Abraham, to Moses. Remember how the Israelites wandered in the dessert. God provided them food—manna—one day at a time. If they tried to store it for the next day, it got worms and mold in it. It didn't keep. One day at a time. One moment at a time. This is how our trust in God grows stronger. We learn that God provides, God heals, God gives what is necessary *as we go*—not all at once. As they went, they were made clean. Now, the text doesn't tell us this, but I suspect that if the lepers had remained sitting there in their pit outside the city walls, waiting for proof of the healing, they would not have found it—they'd have sat there as outcasts with leprous sores until they died.

As they went. All ten of them went. All ten of them were healed. But Scripture then reports that one of them SAW that he was healed. He saw – his eyes were opened – and he high-tailed it back to Jesus to say thank-you. This is more than just sight. This is perception – a recognition that God has touched his life. That is the definition of gratitude – a recognition that God has touched our life, that the skills and talents we've been given, the experiences we've had, the people we love, the earthly comforts in our lives – all of these are gifts. You and I live in country that has become consumed with consuming – with getting not just all we need, but all we want and all we deserve. The American dream is the rags to riches story – success is equated with amassing wealth, solidifying power, and acquiring the finer things. We are not taught to see what we have as gifts. We're taught to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, to fight for our share, to protect our assets. But none of that happens without infrastructure, schools, roads, businesses, transit lines. We succeed because our society has together built the mechanisms for it, and if we fail, it will be because we've lost a sense of accountability to or gratitude for the social fabric that holds us.

So I mean it when I say we live in country that has become consumed with consuming. But we follow a God whose purpose and identity is in giving. Creation, life itself, salvation, love, grace, dreams, opportunities – these are the things God gives again and again and again. When we learn to see the world around us from a perspective of gifts given rather than entitlements earned, the world begins to look very different.

There's a wonderful story told about John Wesley's student days. One evening, a poor porter knocked on Wesley's door and asked to speak with him. During the conversation, Wesley observed that the man's coat was not suited for the weather. He quickly discerned that the man had not eaten and had no place to lay his head. And yet, he was not there to solicit help. He was there to discuss some aspect of faith. When John Wesley questioned him about his health and well-being, the man only expressed gratitude—he was grateful for the coat he had, thin as it was. He was grateful for the gruel he'd been given that morning, for the fact that it hadn't rained last night and so he could sleep beneath the stars, for the love of God and the opportunity to help others experience it.

It would have been so easy for that porter to have given in to discouragement—to believe that life was against him and everything was falling apart. But he refused to live that way, and Wesley sensed something in that man—a kind of wholeness that he himself had not yet found. After the man had left with a coat from Wesley's closet, some money for food, and words of appreciation for the witness he had made, Wesley wrote this in his journal: "I shall never forget that porter. He convinced me there is something in religion to which I am still a stranger." [2 ¶Is adapted/paraphrased from Maxie Dunnam, *Jesus' Claims Our Promises* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Upper Room, 1985), pp. 61-62; appearing in "Learning to Give Thanks" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

There is something in that man's faith that many of us may still be strangers to—gratitude; hope. The two are connected. Life is going to send its share of trouble—to some more than others. But discouragement clouds our vision until we can't see the gifts around us.

“Dr. Joe Harding once told about astronaut Alan Shepard, who, in 1961, became the first American to travel into space... On that first space flight, as the Redstone rocket began to gather speed, it began to vibrate more and more. It was as if the whole rocket would come apart. Shepard knew what was happening. He had been a test pilot. He knew that just before you break through the sound barrier the air resistance is tremendous, almost like hitting a wall. When Shepard reached that point in the flight his body was shaking all over. He couldn't read the instruments. He was about to report what was happening to mission control, but then he realized that, if he did, “Someone would panic and abort the mission.” So he held on. Within 30 seconds all the vibrations were gone, and he knew he was going supersonic. No more noise. No sense of motion. He was flying in space.

Reflecting on that, Dr. Joe Harding writes, “When we experience a little turbulence, we are tempted to abort the mission too soon.” [2 ¶s from “The Healing Power of Faith” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.] We're tempted to draw into ourselves, to batten down the hatches, to protect our own first. But faith teaches us to trust that smoother air is ahead, that a string of turbulent days is not normative for all our days. If entitlement is how we see the world, we're angry and offended when life doesn't go as we want. But if gratitude is how we see the world, we are always mindful that there are blessings to be found, and that gives us staying power. If entitlement is how we see the world, we view other people as there for our use. But if gratitude is how we see the world, we're mindful of others and their needs. Faith and Gratitude are responsible for the new eyes we need to assess the turbulence around us as we go.

All ten of those men were given the same gift. Only one SAW the truth for what it was. Jesus had healed him. And not only healed him, but Jesus made him well, which is really better translated “whole”. It's not a coincidence that I've begun our stewardship campaign talking about vision and wholeness. We've stated here that our mission is loving the whole city and loving the city whole. And it starts with gratitude – with recognizing that God has touched us and gifted us here in ways we have built on and can continue to do so. This congregation is committed to the quiet moments, the unspoken acts of grace, the moments where one person recognizes and honors the humanity of another – the kind of history that changes things for all of us. We're committed to feeding kids and families, to fostering difficult but meaningful conversations, to sheltering all kinds of community groups, to building a community that celebrates diversity, to being a welcoming place for all people, full stop. ALL PEOPLE! We have work yet to do, no question, but the Spirit is moving here. You've invested in our future – in funding a ministry not just meeting a budget. I want you to know that I tithe my income. I give 10% of what you give me right back. And it's enough that if I kept it, I could enjoy some more of the fine things in this world. But I give because I'm grateful to God for the opportunities and the gifts in my life. I didn't earn them. So I can't hoard the fruits. And I give because I believe in you with all my heart. I see your goodness, your devotion to one another, your commitment to bettering this world. You are well, well worth investing in, my friends. And I give because my hearts sees what is not yet – a whole picture of a whole community, a whole world, enjoyed by whole people.

I don't know what the future holds. If you want to see the darkness, the ugliness, the cruelty, it's not hard to find. It's harder to see God's dream for our world, because God builds it as we go. So we step out in faith. We do the work. We share the load. We live the love we've known. Gratefully! I know that you all give of yourselves. I know you share my sense gratitude and you want to give back. I want to hear about that. I want to know your stories and see the world through your eyes. Today, as we kick off our stewardship campaign, I am asking you to help paint a picture of ways God uses your volunteering to impact our community! Where have you or where do you volunteer your time and gifts? Please list your volunteer work in the church and community and share the number of hours you give volunteering if you can. When you're ready, bring your gratitude card forward to pin it on one of the posters upfront, and together, we'll create a tapestry of impact in our community. Together, we'll give thanks for the opportunities we've been given to change things for all of us in this corner of God's Kingdom. Thanks be to God. Amen.