

## Sermon Title: Only One Gave Thanks

**Text:** Luke 17:11-19 – On the way to Jerusalem Jesus 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 their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When He saw them, Jesus 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 Jesus said to him, “Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.”

**Introduction:** Did you know that recently the **Center for Disease Control** reported that cases of leprosy have surged in Florida, stoking primal fears of an infectious disease that has existed for thousands of years? A report published by the agency found that 2020 saw 159 new cases of leprosy in the US. Almost a fifth of those came from central Florida. Given that 21.5 million people call Florida their home, this outbreak of leprosy is far from becoming another pandemic. It is, however, a concern for health officials who can treat the disease with a combination of antibiotics. That hasn’t always been the case. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century care for people with leprosy often was reduced to segregation. In fact, on Jan. 3, 1865, the Kingdom of Hawaii, then a sovereign state, **instituted what was called the “Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy.”** Any person suspected of having the ancient disease would be inspected and, if deemed incurable, permanently exiled to a peninsula on the island of Molokai. It turns out that more than 8,000 people with the dreaded disease fell victim to this policy of permanent segregation over the next century. Native Hawaiians renamed leprosy “THE SICKNESS THAT SEPARATES FAMILY. Surrounded by steep cliffs and treacherous ocean, the peninsula served as a natural prison to prevent lepers from escaping its borders. Soon, it garnered a reputation as a **de facto death sentence**. The lepers lived there in shanties with limited resources. Ships would drop off crates of food and hoped the sea would float the supplies to the land. The message was clear. You are not valuable anymore.

This morning’s story is about ten unfortunate souls who had contracted leprosy. Today it is called **Hansen’s Disease**, named for a **Norwegian doctor** who discovered the BACTERIUM that causes it. There are several kinds of leprosy. **That’s why the Bible uses a term that can refer to a broad range of skin diseases.** In ancient days, it was the most feared disease in the world because it was

INCURABLE AND DEADLY. According to one source, the worst kind of leprosy follows this general pattern: (1) A patch of skin becomes discolored due to a lack of blood supply. It might occur on any part of your body, but often it is first visible on someone's face; (2) The patch of skin turns white or pink and begins to spread rapidly in all directions; (3) The disease spreads to various internal organs. The eyebrows may disappear and spongy tumors appear on the body; (4) Tissue begins to disintegrate causing the hands and feet to become deformed; (5) The nerve endings of the body are destroyed which means that the brain will no longer send pain signals and/or white blood cells to take appropriate action at the place where an injury has occurred. This will lead to the eventual death of the tissue and the loss of the body part.

**This is why God provided special instructions in [Leviticus 13 and 14](#) concerning the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy.** The moment an area of the body appeared to be afflicted with one of these skin diseases, the person was required to present himself before the priest for closer inspection. The priest would then examine the infected skin. The presence of white hair was considered a real danger sign. If the priest deemed it necessary, the person was quarantined for seven days and then inspected again. If the skin disease disappeared, the person was declared to be clean and welcomed back into society. If not, then the afflicted individual was diagnosed with leprosy and sent outside the village to live only with other lepers until the person was cured. Listen to these instructions from [Leviticus 13:45-46](#): **The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes, and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.**

What a terrible thing to happen to someone! Not only was leprosy physically devastating, it was also incurable, and perhaps worst of all, every single relationship with "clean" people was cut off as a result, including one's own family and close friends. Now, let's look at our passage for this morning on Thanksgiving weekend.

Jesus was traveling between Samaria and Galilee where He was raised. He was on his way to Jerusalem where He would be falsely accused, arrested, put through the travesty of an unjust trial, and executed. And to think that all this was part of God's great plan to make people sick with sin well through Jesus' atoning sacrifice. This is what our Lord meant when He said, **"The physician doesn't come to heal the healthy but the sick"**. It is in this in-between place that Jesus

encounters ten lepers who have already been declared unclean and sent outside camp. It's interesting to note that at least one of them was a Samaritan. They were considered half-breeds since the time of the Assyrian captivity in 722 B. C. A number of them had intermarried with people outside their race and over time developed a mixed religion that only in part resembled Judaism. Suffice it to say that Samaritans were not well-liked by Jews. And it is here on the outskirts of these two territories, Samaria and Galilee, that Jesus and the lepers meet. Now let's consider what Jesus observed when He first saw the lepers, and what He commanded them to do

**What Jesus Saw** – Luke 17:11-13 -- **And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."** Just outside of a small, unnamed town, as Jesus prepared to enter its gates, He saw these ten lepers and what a pitiful sight they must have been. With their bodies in various degrees of decomposition, together they called out and begged for His mercy. This assumes that they already knew who Jesus was. Perhaps they had heard of His power to heal all kinds of sickness and diseases. If so, there is no doubt they had discussed this among themselves. And now, to their good fortune, here He was passing by. Even if it meant embarrassing themselves, they were not going to let this opportunity slip past them. So, they called out, **"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."** Now the Hebrew word for mercy is **"HESED."** That's probably the word they used since they associated themselves with Judaism. It means to show lovingkindness toward someone. According to the gospel of Luke, Jesus had already demonstrated "hesed" by cleansing a leper in another village (**Luke 5:12-13**). I'm sure this only served to fan the flames of their enthusiasm as they sought a little lovingkindness from Jesus for themselves. That's what He saw when they first approached Him.

**What Jesus Did** – Luke 17:11-13 -- **When He saw them Jesus said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.** Notice that He did not heal them right there on the spot, though He certainly could have. I'm sure this is what the lepers had hoped for. ***But instead, He commanded them to show themselves to the priests. Now why did He do it this way?*** Because Jesus fully intended to heal them but planned to do so in a way that would be in keeping with the commands of Moses in the Old Testament Law. **The only person who could authenticate that a leper was cured was a priest.** So, the point is that if Jesus hadn't sent them away to the temple, many would have doubted a miracle had taken place at all. Notice that **verse 14** says, **"And as they went they were cleansed."** This means that they were not healed until they obeyed Jesus and started out on their way to the priests. They started walking

and somewhere between where they were and where they were supposed to go, they were healed. Imagine that ... they must have battled some doubts and even feared what would happen if they showed up with the disease still ravaging their bodies. But they did as Jesus commanded and shortly thereafter something wonderful that they could only dream was possible, actually happened. They were completely healed...all ten at the same time.

Now in the case of the ten lepers, it's plain that they had some faith in Jesus. It's seen in their willingness to obey which ultimately led to their healing. God saw that in their going, they were believing that He had the power to cure them. He honored their faith even though we know it must have coexisted with their doubts. There is nothing in the text that suggests that if they hadn't started off to show themselves to the priests, they would have been healed anyway. In this case, Christ required they demonstrate their faith by doing something. I like how one pastor puts it: Our faith moves mountains when our faith moves us. God never calls us to a passive faith that does nothing, even when it comes to something as important as our salvation. Though we know that Jesus does the saving and we can add nothing to His work, we still respond by walking in obedience to His commands because that's how we demonstrate our love for Him (**John 14:21 – Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, He it is who loves me**). Up to this point, we don't know if the ten lepers exhibited saving faith, but we do know that they obeyed Jesus and went off to submit to an examination by the priests, and along the way a miracle occurred! Jesus gave them what they asked for – healing from a horrible, often fatal disease.

Don't underestimate how important obeying the command of God is to both believers and unbelievers alike. Do you remember the story of a man named **Naaman from 2 Kings 5**? He was the commander of the army of the king of Syria. He was held in very high regard by the king but unfortunately, he came down with leprosy. When a Hebrew slave girl was taken captive by his army, she noticed his condition and told **Naaman** about a prophet of Israel (Elisha) who could help him. So, the king of Syria sent a letter to the king of Israel, delivered by Naaman himself, asking for his help in healing his commander. Of course, when the king of Israel received the letter, he felt helpless and tore his clothes in anguish at the request. **"Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore, please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."** Elisha, however, responded very differently when he learned of the letter. **"Please let him come to me,"** he said. Naaman then went with his entourage and stood at the door to Elisha's house. The prophet didn't bother to come out to meet him, but sent his servant who told him to go and wash in the

Jordan river seven times and he would be clean. Naaman was furious. **“Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' 12 Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?”** And in his rage, he turned along with everyone who had come with him and left.

Just then a few of his servants approached the commander and said, **“My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?”** Fortunately for Naaman, he listened and went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. And when he did, his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. JESUS SAW TEN MEN IN DESPERATE NEED AND TOLD THEM TO SHOW THEMSELVES TO THE PRIESTS. AS THEY OBEYED, THEY WERE HEALED.

**What Jesus Said** -- Luke 17:15-18 -- **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 Jesus said to him, “Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.”** Now we would think that all the lepers would have been filled with such gratitude. We don't know why the other nine didn't turn back with praise to God and thanksgiving to Christ as the Samaritan did. Certainly, they were all sick, they were all outcasts, they were all desperate, and, by God's grace, they were all healed. In fact, we see that Jesus was a little puzzled by their response as well. **“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”** There is something about the Samaritan's response that sets him apart from others. All were cleansed of their leprosy, but not all were healed of their sin. It was only to the Samaritan that Jesus said, **“Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.”** Sure, the other nine experienced physical healing, but only this fellow experienced spiritual healing. He was redeemed from the penalty and power of sin to live a new life in Christ. The Bible describes it like this: HE CAME BACK WITH A LOUD VOICE (SOMETHING LEPROSY HAD PROBABLY TAKEN FROM HIM), GLORIFYING GOD AND FELL AT JESUS' FEET TO GIVE THANKS TO HIM. HE CAME TO JESUS AS AN OUTCAST AND LEFT AS A SAVED WORSHIPPER.

**Three thoughts to consider on this Thanksgiving weekend.**

- This story is a picture of the abundant grace of God. Jesus graciously healed all ten lepers of their pain and suffering. He often does that for people whether they believe in Him or not. I challenge you to consider how He has demonstrated His lovingkindness to you over your lifetime, even before you believed, and to give Him thanks for each one.
- This story is also a picture of ingratitude to God that seems so prevalent today. We just celebrated Thanksgiving but many Americans don't even believe in God let alone give Him thanks. They believe there are natural causes for every good and bad thing. This begs the question, "*Who do they give thanks to on Thanksgiving?*" One answer is to all the people who have gone before and made their lives better. But the Bible tells us that every good thing, every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights above in whom there is no variation or shadow due to change – James 1:17. Our ingratitude to God reveals what we believe or don't believe about Him.
- This story is a picture of the unexpected mercy of God. A Samaritan was saved while Jesus' fellow Jews remained separated from God. Often God works in ways that confound us and surprise us. And in each case, it is another demonstration of His "hesed" – lovingkindness and mercy.

**Conclusion:** Martin Rinkert was a minister in the little town of Eilenburg in Germany nearly 400 years ago. He was the son of a poor coppersmith, but somehow, he managed to work his way through school until he finally graduated. In the year 1617, he was offered the post of Archdeacon in his hometown parish. Just a year later, what has come to be known as the *Thirty Years War* broke out. Unfortunately, his town was caught right in the middle. *Twenty years into his ministry*, in 1636, the massive plague that swept across Europe struck Eilenburg ... people died at the rate of fifty a day and the man called upon to bury most of them was Martin Rinkert. In all, over 8,000 people in his parish died, *including Martin's own wife*. His labors finally came to an end about 11 years later, just one year after the conclusion of the war. His ministry spanned 32 years, all but the first and the last overwhelmed by the great conflict that engulfed his town. It was tough for Martin Rinkert to be thankful, but he managed. Listen to the words of this table grace he penned for his children that has now become one of the most beloved Thanksgiving hymns: *Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices; Who wondrous things hath done, in whom His world rejoices*. Isn't it remarkable that this man could cultivate a heart of gratitude while living under some of the worst possible conditions? One of the ironies of life is that throughout history many believers, *who for all appearances have had the least for which to give thanks to God*, seem to be the most grateful. In each case, these

wonderful saints have been able to rise above their trials and difficulties by trusting in the Lord to work in and through some of the worst experiences imaginable for their good and His glory. HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THIS THANKSGIVING WEEKEND? Like Martin Rickert, and an unnamed leper, does your gratitude stir in your heart the desire to give praise to the glory of God?

LET'S TAKE SOME TIME FOR SOME OF YOU TO GIVE THANKS!