

## **“An Attitude of Gratitude”**

### **Introduction**

Last Monday, was the fifth anniversary of 9-11. In services across the country, people said thank you to those who gave their lives to save others. Wives said thank you to husbands. Children said thank you to parents. Politicians said thank you to the working class people who died.

How appropriate that our text for this Sunday is about giving thanks. Today’s Gospel lesson is often called the story of the thankful Samaritan. We all know it well. Ten lepers are healed but only one gives thanks to Jesus. Let’s look a little more closely at these men.

### **The Lepers**

The lepers in today’s Gospel lesson know what it is like to be outcasts. They know what it is like to be rejected. They know what it is like to be without the ability to work or to get adequate healthcare. They even know what it is like to face religious hypocrisy where people tell them that they are sinners and that they brought the disease on themselves.

They are so isolated that when Jesus walks by, they don’t dare shout, “Jesus, heal us.” Instead they shout, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

This is where Jesus really distinguishes himself from the religious leaders of his day. He goes to people who are considered unclean in every way – unclean in a medical sense and unclean in a religious sense.

What Jesus does is even more courageous than a pastor going among prostitutes with AIDS today is. Today it is popular among celebrities to be photographed caring for AIDS patients. Just look at Bono from U2, he loves to be seen caring for the sick. But in Jesus' day, it was not popular to go among the lepers. It was shocking to do so.

When Jesus hears the lepers' cries, he commands them to show themselves to the priests. The priests would check their bodies all over to make sure that they were truly healed. (Leviticus 14) Only after the priests said, "OK," could they go back to living among everyone else.

### **The Samaritan**

But I wonder whether the tenth leper could go to the priests. He is a Samaritan and they do not normally go to the Jewish priests. The Samaritans have their own priests and their own interpretation of Mosaic Law. They accept the first five books of the Bible but not the rest of the Old Testament. They offer sacrifices on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem, but they still worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (There are about 700 Samaritans alive today who still offer sacrifices on Mount Gerizim in modern Israel.)

This one Samaritan, considered a heretic by the Jews, returns to Jesus to give thanks. Jesus wonders why the others have not returned to thank him for something that has completely changed their lives. At any rate, this Samaritan understands who Jesus is before any of the people who were supposed to be knowledgeable about the coming Messiah.

### **An Attitude of Gratitude**

The question that we need to ask ourselves every time we hear this text is, "Are we like the nine or like the one." Are we truly thankful for everything God has given us or do we think we deserve everything we have because we earned it ourselves.

Most Americans were raised to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, to be self-sufficient, to believe that everyone has a right to earn as much as he can earn. When it comes to worldly matters, I think there is some truth to this idea. I think the government should encourage people to be self-sufficient and discourage them from waiting for handouts. From a political standpoint, I agree with this attitude.

But there is more to having success than will power. We all know people who have the will to succeed but who have a health problem that prevents them from economic success. Those of us who work hard and pay our taxes, as good as those things are to do, often forget that our ability to work hard comes from God. We need to be reminded that any ability of which we are proud comes from God, not from ourselves.

When we realize that everything we have comes from God, then we are ready to give thanks. Sometimes God has to take us down a notch or two before we are ready to accept it but eventually God will bring us to that realization.

## **Conclusion**

I'd like to finish with a story of a family that learned to be thankful. According to a story I found on the internet (which means it may or may not be true):

The father and mother of a young man who was killed in the military were members of a little church. One day they came to the

pastor and told him they wanted to give a gift in memory of their son who died in battle.

The pastor said, "That's a wonderful gesture." He asked if it was ok to tell the congregation what they had done and they said that it was. So the next Sunday he told the congregation of the gift given in memory of their son.

On the way home from church, another couple were driving down the highway when the husband said to his wife, "Why don't we give a gift because of our son?" And his wife said, "But our son didn't die in any conflict! Our son is still alive!" Her husband replied, "That's my point! That's all the more reason we ought to give in thanks to God."<sup>1</sup>

Like this couple, we are unthankful when things are going well. It isn't until we experience pain or until we see someone else in pain that we become thankful. It is true that we live in a world filled with pain but this may be what God uses to work thankfulness in us.

*Now may that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> This illustration is based on an illustration from a sermon written by Michael Belcher found at [sermoncentral.com](http://sermoncentral.com).