

Give Praise  
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Luke 17:11–19

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

Believe it or not, this reading is not an indictment of the nine who did not return to thank God through Jesus. For those of us raised on a particular social code of manners, this may come as a surprise. The distinction is, albeit, an odd fine line, but the focus is really on gratitude **in relation to** faith. Theologian Margit Ernst-Habib explains, “With his prostration at Jesus’ feet and his giving thanks, the Samaritan demonstrates a faith that is complete because it includes thankfulness.”<sup>1</sup> A faith that is **complete**. Jesus says to him “your faith has made you well.” What I usually hear in this is that the man’s act of having faith is what made him well. But in the original Greek it’s very clear that it is not the man’s actions but the faith itself that is the actor. Literally translated, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε means “the faith of yours has saved you.” Specifically the verb means “to save a suffering one” and it is faith that has saved the suffering one. The faith is powerful and not of the man’s doing; yet what makes it complete is the marriage with the man’s gratitude. God and man are completed.

This is not to say that God is insufficient or incomplete without humans but to say that God defines Godself in relation to those whom God created. For those who have had children, you wouldn’t be less yourself if you had not but, because you have, you cannot separate yourself from being a parent. Because we have been created by God we are

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4*, p. 166.

wrapped in God's identity as God. And because we have a God who created us, we can no more be separated from our Creator.

So this man who suffered from leprosy, which could be any of a number of skin conditions in that day, asks Jesus, who is said to be healing people wherever he goes, for some mercy, because the man had at least some measure of belief that Jesus could actually affect change. We trust the same could be said of the other nine, who also asked Jesus for mercy. Jesus delivers in the form of complete healing from the skin condition which would have kept him out of the community, literally and figuratively. That is why we read that they were "keeping their distance" – they literally were not permitted to come close to those who were not already affected. Jesus sends them to the priests because it was the priests who declared that they were cured, that they could rejoin the community.

I have to give them credit for their belief because, being not yet visibly healed, they left and headed toward the priests who, had they arrived looking like when they had left, would have been told to turn around and stay away. Think about how their hearts must have soared when they realized they would not be turned away but welcomed in. It was something they had been waiting for, and likely for a long time. Nine of them rushed toward reunion, and understandably, but one put it off just a little longer to thank God first. Faith with thanksgiving is faith completed.

It's why we not only come to worship together but include in our weekly worship songs to God's glory and songs giving God praise, the Gloria Patri<sup>2</sup> and the Doxology.<sup>3</sup> Our reading today is an example of praising God in good; the lament psalms are great examples of praising God in the not-so-good. When we come together and praise God, some of us are at the top of the roller coaster and some of us have taken the deep plunge to the bottom, but still we all sing praise.

This comes back to our completeness in God. When we are at our best, our praise emanates from gratitude for that fact alone – that we are complete in God, that we are

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<sup>2</sup> Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen.

<sup>3</sup> Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise Christ, all people here below; praise Holy Spirit evermore; praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen.

God's. And sometimes we just mouth the words. We get lost in difficulties, forgetting or even struggling to see that being created is the gift. Is it ideal when praise is dutiful over instinctive? No. Is it striving for an ideal? I think so. I wouldn't think to suggest to you that the best Christians are ones who praise God all the time because it just comes naturally to them. If that would be true, there's no hope for me. If that would be true, they must be Jesus since he is the only one without sin, without inclination to turn away from God. So where does that leave us?

The hope of the parable is that we leave encouraged by good examples, that we might look to them and aim to model those good examples. The opening of this chapter in Luke begins with Jesus saying, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come..." something he says not long after he taught about the lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost son, with characters who go the extra mile when everyone else would tell them they were foolish, not obligated, even naïve. This is the kind of God we have, giving when we can't understand. Even when we are just mouthing our praises to God, God is **still** coming to us without obligation. When we remember that, it suddenly becomes much easier to feel compelled to praise God for no other reason than out of gratitude.

Singing praise is just one way of offering it. Praise to God can also look like an act of kindness toward one of God's other children. Praise to God can look like the time you might spend at the Hope Center this afternoon, feeding God's children, sure, but, even more importantly, **seeing** God's children, honoring them as fellow created beings. Praise to God can look like the hand-knitted hats which now adorn the Mitten Tree. Praise to God looks like however you support God's will of peace and protection for all of God's creation. So, friends, let us give praise.

Let us pray: Creator God, you have given us faith and we give you our thanks in return. Help us to not rush ahead without remembering to thank you, we pray. Amen.