

## *Sunday Sermon October 12, 2025*

Once upon a time, a Lutheran pastor went to the barbershop to get a haircut. When the barber had finished, the pastor reached for his wallet to pay, and the barber said: “oh, no, pastor, for clergy, haircuts are free.” The next day, when the barber arrived at his barbershop, sitting outside was a box of chocolates and a thank you note from the Lutheran pastor.

Well that day a rabbi came in for a haircut. After the barber finished, the rabbi reached for his checkbook, and the barber said: “oh, no, rabbi, for clergy, haircuts are free.” The next day the barber got to his barbershop and sitting outside was a bottle of wine, and a hand-written thank you note from the rabbi.

Well that day an Episcopal priest came in. The barber finished, the priest went to pay, “oh, no, father, for clergy, haircuts are free.” The next day the barber arrived at his barbershop and sitting outside – were three more priests!”

Gratitude. Gratitude. In today’s gospel, Jesus is in an “in-between” place between Samaria and Galilee, and ten lepers approach him. Lepers were outcasts because they were considered “unclean” due to their communicable disease. The lepers obediently keep their distance and ask Jesus for mercy – note that: mercy. It’s interesting that they didn’t ask to be healed, to be made clean. They asked for mercy.

They longed for release from their suffering, the suffering of their physical ailments and the suffering of being outcast from the community. Some people probably blamed them for having the disease, like God must be punishing you for something.

Jesus orders them to go show themselves to the priests. This must have given them hope, for surely they knew that they needed the priest’s stamp of approval in order to be declared “clean” and restored to the community.

On their way, they were made clean. But only one came back to thank Jesus – with a loud voice. A Samaritan. The one doubly outcast – a leper and a Samaritan. An outcast among outcasts.

He was the grateful one. The outsider, the double loser, the one who would have been labeled one of “those” people, “those” Samaritans, permanently stained and unclean. He returns praising God...

Barbara Brown Taylor, in reflecting on this text, points out that the nine were fulfilling expectations and doing their duty by obeying the Law as they went to see the priests. She writes: “Nine behaved like good lepers, good Jews; only one, a double loser, behaved like a man in love.”

She then goes on to talk about how hard she tries to fulfill expectations and obey the rules and be a good church-going person, like so many of us. “I know how to be obedient” she writes, “but I do not know how to be in love.”

Maybe that was the difference with the grateful leper. Maybe his relationship with God had grown beyond simple obedience, following the rules, and had entered the realm of love. Maybe he recognized that even though the world told him he was a double loser, that he was God’s precious child, and God walked with him every step of the way.

So when he was blessed, he was grateful, because he recognized the source, the author, of his blessings.

His gratitude is the sign, the symptom if you will, of the leper’s faith and his love for God. It’s his reflexive response to God’s love for him. And so I wonder, how might this kind of gratitude, gratitude rooted in love, be manifest in our lives?

Perhaps in the spiritual practice of seeing God in all things, in every moment, so that gratitude isn’t just an occasional polite sentiment, but an attitude, a reflex, a disposition, a Way of Life...

Rabbi Harold Kushner writes of someone he knew “who had formed the habit of writing Thank You on the lower left corner of every check he wrote. When he

paid his electric bill or phone bill, he would write Thank You to express his gratitude to the companies that made those services available to him.

Even when he paid his taxes, he would write Thank You on the check as a way of reminding himself that his taxes were the price he willingly paid for living in the United States with all of its benefits...

He went even further: "Each night as I prepare for bed, I put drops in my eyes to fend off the threat of glaucoma that would rob me of my sight. Each morning at breakfast, I take a pill to control my blood pressure, and each evening at dinner I take another to lower my cholesterol level.

But instead of lamenting the ailments that come with growing older, instead of wishing I were as young and fit as I once was, I take my medicine with a prayer of thanks that modern science had found ways to help me cope with these ailments. I think of all my ancestors who didn't live long enough to develop the complications of old age, and did not have pills to take when they did."

That's gratitude as a Way of Life, a disposition, a way of being, and attitude. Maybe this is what the grateful leper possessed, so that when he received the gift, he reflexively gave praise and thanks to God, the source of his blessing.

May his example inspire us to joyful gratitude, realizing God's loving presence in every moment of our lives.

Amen