

Thank You

Ps 66: 1-12

Lk 17: 11-19

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Ps 66: 1-12

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise. Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you. All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.” Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip. For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

Lk 17: 11-19

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

Pet peeves. We all have them. Those little frustrations that easily get to us, annoy us, even though they are very small and not truly worth the emotion that they naturally trigger.

You know those times: the driver who cuts you off and then crawls along way below the speed limit, the person on the cell phone who sees no problem turning their private conversation into a public event, the grocery cart left to block the aisle while the shopper mulls over the best bargains.

Pet peeves. We all have them, those emotional fingernails on the blackboard.

My biggest pet peeve had been ungrateful drivers. You know the ones I mean. The person that you yield the right-of-way to so that they can take a left turn or merge into traffic, but then that person just drives on without any acknowledgement of your kind gesture. No smile. No wave. No eye contact. Your act of kindness taken for granted.

As I said, this *used to be* a pet peeve for me, until a friend opened my eyes to a different perspective. We were on our way somewhere together and she was a passenger

in my car. Ahead of us was someone waiting for a break in the traffic, so I slowed and waved him in. He merged without a glance in my direction. As I started to spout off about his lack of courtesy and manners, my friend cut me off and left me silent.

Did you let him into traffic just so he could thank you?

The answer of course was no, but she made me realize that I let him in because I chose to, perhaps for good karma, perhaps just to be nice and also because I appreciate it when I am the one who is given a break.

But no, I didn't *need* to be thanked. I can *hope* for it, but not expect or require it.

That simplistic, insightful 'aha' moment took away the stress of dealing with that particular pet peeve. I will give up my right-of-way because I choose to, not because I expect something in return.

Writer Aldous Huxley wrote that 'most human beings have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted.'

Ralph Waldo Emerson elaborated on that statement by saying that it goes against our nature to feel beholden to someone, to feel vulnerable or weak in the presence of others.

To owe gratitude, to owe thanks, is an acknowledgement of our limits and dependence on others to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This is why it is so much easier to give than to receive.

At our core fight-or-flight survival instinct, the giver is the one with power, the receiver is the one in need.

For some of us, this is about balance. I *will* accept something from you and express my gratitude because there are times when you may accept something from me. For others, giving up power is a sign of weakness. From the small traffic gestures to the major life changing, life affirming, unexpected healings into wholeness, saying 'thank you' can be so difficult that it may just be impossible.

The impossibility of saying 'thank you' may be the reason that only 1 of the 10 lepers healed by Jesus come back to express gratitude and offer glory to God. 9 others, 9 lepers banished from the community, were healed into physical wholeness by Jesus, yet they did not return to say 'thank you' to him.

This particular passage is often used in a disciplinary way, as an object lesson in gratitude in which 90% of the recipients of grace failed to appreciate the giver of the gift. Yet this passage is actually so much more.

The 10 people living with the curse, the disease, of leprosy, were banned from common society as a matter of public health *and* Jewish laws against uncleanness. Isolated from others, they still found the courage to ask for help, to ask for mercy.

Jesus did not touch them to cure them, but did speak to them, giving direction in which they could go. They respectfully accepted his advice, "Go and show yourselves to the priest," without hesitation although they knew that the priests could not, would not, break the Levitical law that banned them from the community. They did not protest. They just obeyed.

Jesus' words led to the *physical* healing of leprosy. It would take the priests' acceptance of the physical healing to grant the social and religious healing of the lepers.

The 9 Jewish former lepers were perhaps welcomed back to the community, reunited with their families, and maybe even glorified God with sacrificial offerings. Luke does not tell us any of this, it is a guess of logical speculation as all facts cannot be

known. Luke's point then *may not* be about gratitude despite the common interpretation.

No, instead his point may be that the only one that returned *was a Samaritan*, one who would not be welcomed in the Jewish community. Luke's message is about Jesus' compassionate welcome of *all* people; there are no religious lepers.

But the common reading of this passage is understood to be about gratitude, about our sincere appreciation of what we have, what has been given to us.

The words of the psalmist's praise are words of advice still today. "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord."

Writer William Ward asks, "God gave you a gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have you used one to say "thank you"?"

Are we one? Are we among the 9?

It is our nature, our very human nature to take things for granted, to fear dependence, to seek self-reliance. Yet it takes one who was an outcast, who was dependent upon charity and food scraps, one who was unwelcome anywhere, who reminds us of the connection and relationship found in the phrase "thank you".

German theologian and philosopher Meister Eckhart famously said that "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice." to encourage us to reflect on the times we are given to and have then an opportunity to express our gratitude.

He asks, "Can we be thankful for gifts of grace as a sign of human strength and not human weakness? Can we be thankful for life's important lessons no matter where they come from?"

Aldous Huxley would say 'no', but Anne Lamott would answer that in a much different way.

"Here are the two best prayers I know," she says. "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

This is how we remember that we are not independent as much as we are *interdependent*, that we do not fly as solo as much as we think we can, but rather it is in partnership, in relationship, and in community that we are strong. It is a humble strength to accept, acknowledge, and affirm the gracious generosity of others.

After all, if the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice. Amen.