

Giving Our Thanks and Praise

Luke 17:11-19

October 9, 2022

First Presbyterian, Luling

I'm going to start in what seems like a weird place today. We're going to back up to Luke 10, the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus tells that parable in response to a question. A lawyer had summarized the law, Jesus commends him for his summary, which in other places Jesus identifies as the greatest commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and the second which is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. Well, the lawyer wants to understand what the meaning of that law is, so he asks Jesus "Who is my neighbor?" Rather than a quick answer, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, which puts the Samaritan in the hero's role, as the one who loved his neighbor. And Jesus closes that parable with a command: Go and do likewise.

Though the parable of the good Samaritan has prompted an endless number of sermons, with an endless number of conclusions, the message is pretty straightforward and explicit. This is what it looks like to love your neighbor. The Samaritan is the one who showed mercy, is how the lawyer characterizes it. How you love your neighbor is to show mercy.

Today's passage is also about a Samaritan, and also about the greatest of commandments. Similar to how the Good Samaritan demonstrated how to love neighbor, this *thankful* Samaritan will demonstrate how to love God. The greatest commandments, exemplified by Samaritans. We need to remind ourselves that Samaritans were outsiders, outcasts, second class citizens. The divisions between Judeans and Samaritans were historical and deep. Each viewed the other as religiously suspect, because of the rules and restrictions they placed on worship, even though they shared the same Scriptures. Nobody fights like siblings, and this seems to be the case between Judeans and Samaritans. They started with the same Scriptures, ended up worshipping in different places and in different ways, and literally attacked one another because they were different. The division between them was real and sharp, occasionally violent, and reinforced religiously. There was nothing good about a Samaritan, which is what makes Jesus's parable of the Samaritan who showed mercy so shocking. "Go and do likewise" like a *Samaritan?*

Samaria and Samaritans haven't been mentioned again in Luke, between

the Good Samaritan in chapter 10 and right here in chapter 17. And like the Good Samaritan, this man's identity as a Samaritan is not disclosed at the beginning of the story.

Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, on the way to the cross. This journey is long in Luke. They're in the region between Galilee and Samaria, which is to say, on the border. We understand a bit that the border is a region unto itself, not simply a line. Cultures mix and mingle in different ways near a border. And it seems that they've mixed and mingled here. Ten men, apparently nine Jewish men and one Samaritan man, who have leprosy, namely an unidentified skin disease, call out to Jesus. They call him Jesus, which only a few others do in Luke, and they call him Master, which except for these ten guys, is a term reserved for the disciples in Luke. It seems like they've heard of Jesus and know his reputation for healing. "Have mercy on us," they say. Same "mercy" as in the Good Samaritan, by the way. They don't approach Jesus, following the requirements of lepers to stay far away from the community. That's presumably why these ten have banded together—they were all outcasts.

Jesus sees them. Which is worth pausing to consider. Jesus sees them, when so many others look right past them, ignore them, try to stay as far away from them as possible. Jesus sees them and tells them to go and show themselves to the priests, again that is what the law required. And this isn't written or spoken, but the plural of priests there is interesting. Because the nine Jewish lepers would have headed to the Temple in Jerusalem to show themselves to the priest there. But the Samaritan would have headed in a different direction, to the shrine or temple they believed was central, on Mount Gerizim.

As they head out, they are made clean. They see that. One of them turns back, praising God with a loud voice. He bows before Jesus, thanking him all the while.

Then Luke pops the surprise. This one leper who acts most admirably and fully, not just exhibiting good manners, but a real and deep and full act of gratitude and worship, this one guy who is obviously the best of the ten? He's a Samaritan. One of *them*.

The Samaritan is the one who has turned around, praised God, bowed before Jesus, is thanking Jesus over and over. The Samaritan. Again, he is the one who fulfills the law and the spirit of the great commandment.

Just in case we don't catch on, Jesus gets a little feisty. "Weren't all ten made clean? Where are the others? Weren't any of them going to come back and praise God? No? Only this foreigner?" Well then. Nobody answer Jesus's

questions, which weren't really questions anyway. Like the Good Samaritan, this encounter ends with a command. Jesus commands the Samaritan to go, because his faith has made him whole.

When the girls were little, we of course wanted to teach them manners. Getting them to learn "please" was pretty straightforward. If they were asking for something—a drink of water, a toy, a snack—I would simply not hand it to them until they had said please. It didn't take them long to catch on. But once they had the thing, learning to say "thank you" unprompted was a whole lot more difficult. There was no obvious incentive. But eventually, it sunk in. A raised eyebrow from me when they forget is usually enough to remind them. And just yesterday, one of them thanked me for making pancakes. She muddied up her record later by pointing out that she was the only one in the family who thanked me for the pancakes, thus wanting to make sure I noticed and credited her with the extra good manners. But nonetheless, a practice of thankfulness soaks into us, when repeated regularly.

It had sunk into the Samaritan, because he immediately returns to worship and praise and give thanks. It wasn't calculated, it was a genuine and instinctive response. This Samaritan demonstrated what loving the Lord our God with all our heart soul strength and mind looks like. He sees he is healed, he interrupts his trip to fulfill the law, to be restored to community, in order to worship. There's no pause to analyze what he does or says. It's instinctual. His worship involves body and soul. It is praise *and* thanksgiving, praise and thanksgiving to the one who made him whole, who makes us all whole.

The outsiders show us, are the examples, of how to fulfill the greatest commandments. Love the Lord your God by ingrained and instinctual and praise and a habit of thanksgiving that you express with genuineness and fullness of heart. And love your neighbor by showing mercy. These two Samaritans show us the way.