It is Right to Give Thanks
Luke 17: 11-19
Proper 23, Year C
The Ten Lepers Cleansed…
St. John's, Clinton
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The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Canon Jo Ann Hardy, beloved lay leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan once said to me, "The only thank you letter that is late, is the one that hasn't been sent." The only thank you letter that is late, is the one that has yet to be sent.

Which leads me to think that there is still time for the nine who were cleansed from leprosy by Jesus, they still have some time to make their way back to him and give thanks. It says to me, that I have time to turn toward Jesus Christ and give him thanks and praise for all that He has done for me, given me, offered to me.

Jesus was traveling, on his way to Jerusalem, he is teaching and preaching and healing along the way. Somewhere in the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee, ten lepers approach, but not too close and call out to him. "Jesus, have mercy on us." He replies, without making a big deal, "Go and show yourselves to the Priests."

Going to the priests, meant seeking out, the ones who could determine if those who had at one point fallen ill with a raft of different skin diseases, all placed under the category of "Leprosy," could be declared healed and ritually cleaned.

Those who had Hanson's disease, actually leprosy were likely to spend their lives, once they had taken ill, in exile, far away from their family and friends. Reduced to spending their time in the borderlands of life: betwixt and between. People were exiled to prevent the spread of the disease.

Others who developed skin issues, lesions, boils, blisters, many of them would suffer the course of the disease and then be able to return to their families, once the priests no longer saw any symptoms or signs. (I cannot imagine, living without antibiotics…but they did. It was just a lot harder and life spans were much shorter.)

Now Jesus is telling the 10 to go find the priests. He doesn't say that they are or will be healed. He just says, "Go." And they do, without question. They ask him, he answers them. I am struck by this.

I'm a girl who frequently needs a little bit more background, maybe some drama, an event to happen for me to notice, to then go and do something new. But these lepers are either so faith filled, or so desperate, that they go to find the priests without query or comment.

And I'm impressed.

It may be that I have never been that desperate or that faithful. But they are and they do, and they are indeed healed along the way. And in the telling of this story, I want the 9 who didn't turn back and say "Thank you to Jesus" I want them to get some credit too.

And the one who turned back, the leper who realized he had been healed along the way, the one who went back and fell before Jesus and gave Jesus thanks, the Greek word used in this passage describing the Samaritan leper who prostrates himself before and Jesus and gives thanks, the word that is used for giving thanks is *eucharisto.* It's *eucharisto,* eucharist. We give thanks.

The interesting thing that happens for the leper who comes back, the thing that separates him from the others, is not being made cleaned, they are all cleansed, but he alone is the one who gets to be close to Jesus. He alone is the one who draws near, he alone is the one who is singled out and talked about. He alone is the one who has a close physical connection with embodied, incarnate holiness. He alone is the one to whom Jesus speaks directly. "Get up. Go on your way. Your faith has made you well."

There is no doubt in my mind that this leper, Samaritan outcast that he was, has moved from the borderlands of exile to the inner circle of hope. He knows now how much he matters. It's the unexpected judo of giving thanks that opens us up, makes us porous to God's love and care.

When we stop, when we turn for a moment from attending to our day to day cares, and remember all that is, all that has been, and envision all that may be, it's in those moments that God, who is the maker of heaven and earth, it is then that we remember whose image and likeness we are created.

Not all of us remember to stop and turn to God. Not all of us do it regularly. But when we do, when I do, I am changed.

So, in this fraught, frail, freaking hard time in our world, I invite all of us and I charge myself to return and give and praise.

Perhaps saying:

> *Lift up your hearts.*
> *We lift them to the Lord.*
> *Let us give thanks to Lord our God.*
> *It is right to give God thanks and Praise.*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Amen.