

A man stopped by the post office to mail a quick letter. As he stood at the work counter beside the trash barrels... where post office box holder often sort their mail... he was placing his stamp on his letter when an elder man approached him. The older fellow had a post card in his hand. He asked, "*Sir, could you please address this post card for me? The arthritis in my hands is just too painful for me this morning*" ... Even though the younger man was in somewhat of a hurry... he recognized that this poor man needed his help. "*Sure... I'd be glad to...*" he told the elderly man. He wrote the name and address on the front of the card just as the older fellow dictated it to him. ... The man needing help then asked if his helper would also write a brief note of the back of the postcard... which he did... once again... just as it was dictated. He even signed the post card as if the arthritic man himself had signed it.

Finally the man doing the writing said to the older man, "*Now, is there anything else I can do for you?*"

The old fellow thought about it for a minute, and he said, "*Yes, at the end could you just put, 'P.S. Please excuse the sloppy handwriting.'*"

It is easy for us to see that gratitude... instead of a gripe... was more appropriate in this situation. ... Isn't it too bad that we are not so prone to recognize the many situations in our own life... when gratitude is called for... rather than a gripe...?

Journalist James Glassman declares that "a culture of complaint" has infected American society. The grievances of Americans are many, but include a protest against the prevalence of outsourcing, as U.S. companies

move jobs to countries like China and India. Some Americans file complaints against food companies, seeking to hold a corporation responsible for making them fat. Others seek litigation against banks for lending them money even though they were a credit risk. There are complaints about overcrowding in schools, low paying jobs, and cheap foreign labor. The truth is that some of these complaints are unfounded or else ignore offsetting blessings.

Compare the American way of life with the low quality of life people in other countries experience. Glassman writes, "Is it fair for Americans, with our rich infrastructure, our clean water, our incredible financial markets, to compete against poor Indians, who have to climb over sleeping beggars on their way to work? Who should be complaining here?"

According to Glassman, there are many reasons not to complain:

- In 1955 the ratio of students to teachers was 30 to 1. Today it is 19 to 1.
- Adjusted for inflation, compensation has tripled since 1947, and the cost of necessities has plummeted.
- Food in 1950 represented about one third of a family's total expenditures; today, it's one seventh.
- The U.S. Gross Domestic Product is more than the total of the next five countries.
- The current U.S. unemployment rate, as high as it is, is still lower than than most countries, including industrialized countries.
- Americans work fewer hours, and have more cars, cultural institutions, and children in college than ever before.

The U.S. may jeopardize her prosperity if too many citizens demand and expect an easy road through life and complain about the smallest obstacles and setbacks.

And Christian culture is not immune. ... The contemporary diseases that afflict others... attach to Christians as well... so that in some cases... apart from perfunctory prayers of thanks at meals... no one would ever know we are grateful people... much less recipients of divine healing grace. ... This ought not to be.

Scripturally... thankless Christians are a contradiction in terms.

Philippians 4:4 (ESV)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Romans 1:21 (ESV)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

An unthankful heart is fertile soil for all kinds of sins.

This is why we have the narrative of Jesus healing the ten lepers in our passage from Luke this morning. ... Every child of God should cultivate the grace of gratitude. ... It not only opens the heart to further blessings... but glorifies and pleases the Father.

On the outskirts of an unnamed village... on the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee... ten leprous men stood before Jesus... in various stages of decay. Their clothing was torn in perpetual mourning... their skeletal heads uncovered... except for the dust they showered themselves with as a symbol of their lamentation. ... "Unclean, unclean!" ...they were required

to shout... in order to keep others away and becoming contaminated with their disease.

Luke 17:11-14

They looked as though they had climbed out of the graves. ... But they were alive... feeling souls... someone's son... someone's daughter... someone's cousin ... whose life was once filled with joy and laughter... being with friends and family... but now... living in the nether world of society's fringe... while they rotted away. ... So from a safe distance they shouted the traditional plea, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ... They were loud and persistent. "Have mercy on us!" "Master, have mercy!" "Mercy please!"

But these people had hope... for Jesus was passing by... and they cried out for mercy. The word translated "master" ... is the same one Peter used (Luke 5:5)... and means "chief commander." ... They knew that Jesus was totally in command... of even disease and death... and their hope sprang to life... trusting Him to help them.

Once Jesus saw them... He immediately responded. ... However... its interesting that unlike the previous time in Luke (Luke chapter 5) when Jesus healed a leper... this time there was no touch. ... And a pronouncement, "*Be clean!*" was also conspicuously missing. In this case... Jesus simply told them... leprous as they were... "*Go show yourselves to the priests*" ... The command was to do what a *cured leper* would do... following the regulations stipulated in Leviticus 14... which required examination by a priest. ... Only after a priest declares them

clean once again... they would joyfully undergo an eight-day ceremony and then be reunited with their families.

But remember... Jesus did not give any indication that they were healed BEFORE He told them to go to the priests. In fact... according to verse 14... it was only as they went... that they experienced the healing. ... These ten lepers had to decide... while they still had leprosy... whether or not they would obey the command of Jesus.

Jesus' command required faith... and we can suppose that not all the lepers were of the same mind... or proneness to believe. No ten people would be. ... Some were probably convinced they should go to the priest immediately. Others may have hesitated a bit. ... After all... it was a long way to the temple. ... If Jesus could heal them... why did he not just do it? What fools they would be... if they tried to see a priest but were still leprous. ... On the other hand... they had everything to gain and very little to lose. ... The consensus was to give it a try. So they set off at their stumbling lepers' pace.

"And as they went... they were cleansed"... It was a mass healing! There were no mirrors to reflect the dramatic change... but they saw it in each other instantly. ... From cadaverous faces... reemerged ears... noses... eyebrows... lashes... hairlines. Feet... that had been toeless... ulcerated stubs — were suddenly whole... bursting their shrunken sandals. ... Knobby appendages grew fingers. ... Barnacled skin... became soft and supple. It was like ten new-births. They must have kicked up a lot of dust in a wild celebration!

Among those ten lepers was a Samaritan. ...Normally Jews and Samaritans would not normally live together... but misery loves company and all ten were outcasts. ... What difference does birth make if you are experiencing a living death?... These people had been united by their common misery — nine Jews and one Samaritan as a once-suffering community... but now a raucous jubilation!

Luke 17:15-16

When the healing occurred... it was the Samaritan... who was seized with "an irresistible emotion of gratitude." ... He put off going to the temple to rush back to Jesus. ... The ceremonial clean bill of health could wait. This Samaritan recognized that his spiritual obligation... overrode his ceremonial need. ... So the Samaritan and the Jews parted company.

The account continues by referring to *nine ungrateful men*

Luke 17:17-18

You would have expected all ten men to run to Jesus... and thank Him for a new start in life... but only one did so — and he was not even a Jew. ... How grateful the men should have been... for the providence of God that brought Jesus into their area... for the love that caused Him to pay attention to them and their need... and for the grace and power of God that brought about their healing.

Jesus asked three closely coordinated questions... all three were asked with a tone of astonishment: "*Were not all ten cleansed? ... Where are the*

other nine? ... Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

I don't think that the questions were rhetorical. ... I think that Jesus fully expected all ten to return... glorifying God... and then to receive the ultimate blessing which Jesus was ready to give each of them. I think Jesus was disappointed!

Evidently... the other nine lepers were so caught up in their new wholeness that it did not occur to them to return to Jesus. ... OK... But isn't this understandable at one level...? I mean... after all... Jesus had told them to show themselves to the priests. ... Of course they were thankful. ... How could they be other wise? ... And they were deeply happy. ... They must have been very eager to get back into everyday life.

Shouldn't we be sympathetic and understanding with the 9's not returning to Jesus? ... He told them to go to the priest... and they did!

Here is the problem... ...God was not the center of their gratitude. ... Note Jesus' final question in verse 18: "*Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"*

Only the foreigner... the Samaritan... gave praise to God! ...The other nine were so earthbound... that they missed the **spiritual** dimension altogether.

(LISTEN!)Vague gratitude toward God... is never an adequate response to what He does in our lives! Christ wanted their hearts! ... By failing to

glorify God and returning to thank Jesus, they missed the greatest possible moment of their existence.

But before we judge them too harshly... what is your own "GQ" — "Gratitude Quotient"? ... How often do you take your blessings for granted and fail to thank the Lord? ... Too often we are content to enjoy the gift but we forget the Giver. We are quick to pray but slow to praise.

We simply MUST celebrate our chosenness constantly... This means saying "thank you" to God for having chosen you... and "thank you" to all who remind you of your chosenness. ... Gratitude is the most fruitful way of deepening your consciousness... that you are not an "accident"... but a divine choice.

Brennan Manning has written:

I believe that the real difference in the American church is not between conservatives and liberals, fundamentalists and charismatics, nor between Republicans and Democrats. The real difference is between the aware and the unaware.

When somebody is aware of that love—the same love that the Father has for Jesus—that person is just spontaneously grateful. Cries of thankfulness become the dominant characteristic of the interior life, and the byproduct of gratitude is joy. We're not joyful and then become grateful—we're grateful, and that makes us joyful.

The whole Christian life is one big "Thank You"... the living expression of our gratitude to God for His goodness. ... But we take Him for granted... and what we take for granted... we never take seriously.

One reason that we don't give God our thanks... is that we are used to having so much. ... We simply assume that we will have all the good things of life. ... Another reason is that it hurts our pride to be grateful. ... We do not want to admit that God is the Provider of all good things. We are simply His stewards. ... Being thankful requires humility and faith in God. When we have these, we can be grateful.

By coming to Jesus... the man received something greater than physical healing: he was also saved from his sins.

Luke 17:19

Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you" (that is the literal translation). This is the same pronouncement that Jesus spoke to the repentant woman who anointed His feet (in Luke 7:50).

Bible scholars have something very interesting to point out about this pronouncement by Jesus. I. H. Marshall writes, "His faith has been the means of his cure and his salvation." ... Joseph A. Fitzmyer translates this as "Your faith has brought you salvation." ... And John Nolland writes: "But as much of a foreigner as he might be, this man is now sent off by Jesus as a person who has experienced the salvation that Jesus came to bring. None of the others, despite their new-found freedom from leprosy, receives this special blessing."

The Samaritan's nine friends were only healed by Christ... but the Samaritan was **saved** by the Son of God! ... While it is wonderful to experience the miracle of physical healing... it is even more wonderful to experience the miracle of **eternal** salvation.

What about you...? Have you been blessed by this greater of the two miracles...? Do you have the matter of where you will spend eternity completely settled...?

Because if you do... then Christ expects your thanks. And this is not just a one time offering. It is a life that is lived as a thank-you to Him.

I recently gave this quote from Henri Nouwen... but I think it is appropriate to use it again:

To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives—the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections—that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only truly grateful people when we can say "thank you" to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for. Let's not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God.

What would be the difference in the way you live tomorrow... Monday morning and all day... if you purposed to live the whole day... as a thank-you to Christ... because He has given you eternal life...? What will it take... in order for you to live this kind of a life saying Thank-You...? What obstacles would keep you from living as you know God wants you to live?

Now... if you do not know where you will spend your eternity... you can settle that matter today...