

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Theme: One out of Ten

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during All Age/Harvest Thanksgiving Service on 18/10/2015 at 10.30am

In a little church, there was a father and mother of a young man killed in a military battle. One day, they came to the pastor and told him they wanted to give a monetary gift as a memorial to their son who died in battle. The pastor said, "That's a wonderful gesture on your part." He asked if it was okay to tell the congregation, and they said that it was. The next Sunday he told the congregation of the gift given in memory of the dead son. On the way home from church, another couple was driving down the highway when the father said to his wife, "Why don't we give a gift because of our son?" And his wife said, "But our son didn't die in any conflict! Our son is still alive!" Her husband replied, "That's exactly my point! That's all the more reason we ought to give in thanks to God."

Let us now go to our bible passage, Luke 17. We have learned to expect Jesus to heal people and for that healing to happen Jesus would be present. Not here! The lepers who are the object of this remarkable healing are told to do something a bit unusual. You see, Jesus did not heal these people on the spot. He tells these poor souls to go and show themselves to the priests. It is not really so strange because the instructions are in keeping with the Levitical instructions found in **Leviticus 13:1-2**, "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 'When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests.' Jesus, in instructing these ten lepers does so with the intention that they will be healed before they reach their destination.

Thus, Luke has provided us with a marvellous model of faith. **Faith means, going on, anticipating that what is promised to you is going to be fulfilled.** Or better yet, faith means, I have a part in my healing. It is not going to happen, my life is not going to change, if I just sit still. **It is going to happen only if, in trust, I get up and live as if it has already happened.** That is called "proleptic," that wonderful theological word, which means that you live now the way it is going to be. You anticipate the promise being fulfilled before it is fulfilled in your life. That is what faith means. You get up and start going.

God's part is up to God. I have nothing to do with that. But my part is to believe that God is already at work, even if I cannot discern it, for God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. My role is to start out, keep on going, never give up, and see what happens.

We have been looking at the life of Abraham in his journey with God. We saw how he stumbled, fell, but also how God picked him up and afterwards, he continued his walk with God. That is faith. A life of obedience that is committed to walking with God no matter the circumstances.

It is important here for us to pause and understand what it meant to be a person in the time of Jesus who had such a disease. In our world, we may make an analogy by looking toward the Ebola pandemic. **People with Ebola virus, in many instances, were shunned by family and friends. But as horrible as that may be, it pales in comparison to the way lepers were treated in the time of our Lord.**

Lepers were ostracized legally. They couldn't enter villages or cities. They had to stay out on the borders of life. They were to get out of the way on the road if they saw somebody coming toward them, so that that person would not have to encounter a leper. They were classified as the living dead. **They were to cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn people to stay clear of the contaminated area.**

It makes sense that this incident should take place along the border, because borders in every country are sort of "no-man's lands." You keep away from the border, because it is where you would be sure to encounter something unsavoury: outcasts, fugitives, criminals, or lepers. Jesus is walking along the border. Some lepers approach him. But instead of shouting, "Unclean!" they shout, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." They did not ask for healing but for pity, for whatever Jesus might give them - food, clothing, shelter, whatever he decided to offer.

Which is not the cry of a leper, but the cry of a penitent. Their cry, as a matter of fact, is the *Kyrie Eleison*, "Lord have mercy." **It is the prayer of the Church which shows that we are totally dependent on God's gracious mercy – not what we deserve.**

They had to scream because by law, lepers were required to stay some 50 yards away from all other human beings. Half a football field away... they scream, trying to get Jesus' attention. Jesus gives them His attention and then something more. He tells them to go show themselves to the priests... and as they go they suddenly realize that they are cleansed, made whole, healed, delivered from this despicable, debilitating disease... and from that horrible, isolated, outcast existence.

And they were all so thrilled, so excited, so moved, so grateful... that they all immediately turned around and ran back to thank Jesus for what He had done for them? No! Not quite! Only one of them did that. The Samaritan in the group. The outcast among outcasts. He was the only one who stopped to say thanks. The nine others went on their merry way. I know what you're thinking right about now: "Shame on those ungrateful nine! If I'd been there. **If I'd been one of those cleansed lepers... I would have turned back and thanked Jesus!**" **Sure you would've. Why don't you do it now?** Has he cleansed you, saved you, delivered you? Have you really thanked him? You see... we are so often like those nine lepers who forgot to say thanks...

Now, imagine that you have suffered with this disease and Jesus recognizes your plea for healing and mercy. You are healed; a miracle has happened in your life; your life has quite literally been restored. Do you not think that gratitude would be a natural by-product of this miracle? Wouldn't you be terribly disappointed if nine out of ten of those healed simply walked away without so much as a "thanks"? And who is it that takes the time to acknowledge this wonderful miracle? All of the lepers must have believed that Jesus was capable of performing this remarkable healing. But the only one who takes the time to personally come back and thank Jesus, is a despised Samaritan. It is the Samaritan who has the genuine faith. He was not only healed physically, he was healed holistically.

The Samaritan who returned must have understood that genuine faith involves the recognition that God's mercies are undeserved. Gratitude, therefore, is an essential part of true faith. If there is one shortcoming that is most evident in our world today, it is that people, not all, but many suffer from a condition of ingratitude. God does so much for us. Our indebtedness to God is enormous and yet we rarely offer thanks for what God has done in our lives. In fact, most professing Christians don't even offer thanks over their meals much less

offer thanks over all that God does in their lives. We are much like the little boy who was given an orange by a man. The boy's mother asked, "What do you say to the nice man?" The little boy thought and handed the orange back and said, "Peel it."

It is really important to understand how important it is to show in a concrete way that we acknowledge that without God our lives are empty. The Samaritan sets a wonderful example for us all. He saw a reason to praise. He saw that his life was forever changed for the better. He understood that nothing he did or could do would have ended with the same results. He saw a change that only Jesus could have made possible. He saw an opportunity to praise God and he seized it. **Many see their need to pray but don't see their need to praise.** I don't know how it happened; the Bible does not allow us to peek into the life of this man. We are not told what it was about him that pulled him at that place at that time to go back to see Jesus. Maybe as they walked toward the priest's house he began to notice his skin losing that scaly, white appearance. Or maybe they passed people who would ordinarily have turned away in disgust, but now they did not. I really don't know how he came to the conclusion, **but when he saw that he was healed he stopped going in one direction, turned around, and began moving in a new direction.** He began a new journey of faith and it led him back to Jesus Christ. He had reason to praise God. They all had reason to praise God, but only one saw it.

What on earth should we be grateful for?

First and foremost, I am grateful that I do not have to die a second death because Jesus took the burden of sin, which is death, away from me by dying in my place. I used to be like a leper, and carrying the most dangerous form of Ebola, because that is how my sin looks before God. And he cleansed me. Now I am free!

We give thanks because it pleases the Lord and shows that we are not taking His benefits for granted.

Someone rightly observed that: if you woke up this morning with more health than illness ...you are more blessed than the millions who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation...you are ahead of 20 million people around the world. If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death...you are more blessed than three billion people around the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head...you are richer than 75% of this world. if you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace...you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

When we develop a habit of giving thanks, it produces contentment. Someone did an inventory of some of the weird things that we should be thankful for:

- ... the taxes I pay because it means I'm employed.
- ... my shadow because it means I am out in the sunshine.
- ... a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need washing and gutters that require cleaning out because it means I have a home.
- ... my gas bill because it means I am warm.
- ... all the complaining I hear about our government and our political leaders because it means we have freedom of speech.

What will you do today? Will you join the nine who walked away, or join hands with the One out of Ten?

Life must be seen in perspective. Let us pray for an attitude that recognises and gives thanks to God for the things He gives us freely and His gracious benefits to us in many ways rather than moaning about the things that we do not have. **I was once like a leper in the eyes of a holy God, covered all over with lesions of sin, but His grace found me and made me whole. I am forever grateful.**