

Luke 17:11-19 The Message (MSG)

11-13 It happened that as he made his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met him. They kept their distance but raised their voices, calling out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

14-16 Taking a good look at them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

They went, and while still on their way, became clean. One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. He knelt at Jesus’ feet, so grateful. He couldn’t thank him enough—and he was a Samaritan.

17-19 Jesus said, “Were not ten healed? Where are the nine? Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?” Then he said to him, “Get up. On your way. Your faith has healed and saved you.”

“How are you?” ‘Fine?’ ‘Okay’ Do you give a medical rundown?

“How are you?” Are you “fine”? or are you GRATEFUL?

“I’m grateful.”

Are you able to express your gratitude?

“I’m grateful.” Do you choose a response with care?

Do you understand that gratitude is not only a response to good fortune but also a **choice** we make?

“while still on their way, became clean. One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude”,

That’s true of the leper in today’s Gospel reading. Ten were healed. Ten, no doubt, were surprised at this discovery. One chose to run back and shout out to Jesus. Perhaps the others were overjoyed. Perhaps some celebrated. Perhaps others ran to tell their family and friends. Perhaps a few even took it for granted. Who knows? What we do know is that one not only felt thankful but **decided to give voice** to those emotions, to express his gratitude to Jesus and to God.

At least one leper had gratitude.



Gratitude is a response to the blessings of life, but it is also a choice

- to see those blessings,
- name them,
- and express our gratitude in word and deed.

Giving voice to gratitude is a choice with consequences, for as we express our gratitude, we affect those around us, we even shape the reality in which we live. Think about it.

Gratitude is not the only emotion we might choose to express in response to the events of any given day. There are reasons for gratitude, and reasons for fear,

- for anger,
- for frustration,
- grief,
- for regret,
- for apprehension.

Each and all these colors our experience, makes its appearance on the stage of our lives, and perhaps each has a place and role to play from time to time.

We *choose* how much stage time to grant each of these emotions by giving them expression, and as we do so we give them power in our lives. Let's give gratitude some time this week of Thanksgiving.

Do you choose to be grateful?

- When confronted by someone who is angry, do you respond with anger as a form of self-protection or do you choose empathy, trying to understand the emotions of the other, and gratitude that the person was willing to be honest?
- At school or work, do you express frustration or a resolve to keep at it and gratitude for what we've learned? These are choices.

To choose gratitude seems like a tall order, beyond the reach of most of us, available only to a few spiritual giants.

Maybe it is a response that, if we choose to **practice over and over during** our lifetime ... will come more easily.

Gratitude,



like all our other options, *becomes easier* when we choose to practice it.

Gratitude, like faith and hope and love and commitment, are not inborn traits that some have, and others don't, but rather *gratitude is more like a muscle* that can be strengthened over time.

And as you practice giving thanks and more frequently share your gratitude, you not only grow in gratitude but create an example for others. More than that, you create a climate in which it is easier to be grateful and encourage those around you to see the blessings all around us.

How are you? “I’m grateful.”

Take a moment to scan the headlines and you’ll see how scarce – and how desperately needed – more expressions of gratitude are.

Accusation, excuses, venting anger – these emotions seem to have hold of our culture. We seem to live in the age of complaint. What a powerful response gratitude is to all the complaints we hear.

Saying “I’m grateful” does not simply express our thanksgiving but gives voice to **a counter-cultural witness** that has the power to shape those around us, push back the tide of resentment and complaint that ails us, and it makes room for a fresh appreciation of God’s renewing, saving grace.

Practice your gratitude and develop a greater **thanksgiving-oriented “muscle memory”** by responding this week to the question, “How are you,” with the simple but powerful reply, “I’m grateful.”

Develop a **gratitude list**. Review it say it aloud each night before you go to bed.

Two words of counsel:

First, depending on your circumstances, this may be difficult for you. Overwhelmed by grief or loss, for instance, you may have difficulty in giving voice to gratitude just now. And that’s okay. It will come. *Gratitude is not a command, it’s an invitation*, one God never tires of making. If this seems beyond you now, God understands.



Second:Let's "rehearse" practicing gratitude in the congregation this Sunday. I will say, "How are you?" and the congregation responds, "I'm grateful." We will do this three times,

"Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

An illustration of Gratitude from Max Lucado

Old Eddie

It happens every Friday evening, almost without fail, when the sun resembles a giant orange and is starting to dip into the blue ocean. Old Ed comes strolling along the beach to his favorite pier. Clutched in his bony hand is a bucket of shrimp.

Ed walks out to the end of the pier, where it seems he almost has the world to himself. The glow of the sun is a golden bronze now. Everybody's gone, except for a few joggers on the beach. Standing out on the end of the pier, Ed is alone with his thoughts....and his bucket of shrimp.

Before long, however, he is no longer alone. Up in the sky a thousand white dots come screeching and squawking, winging their way toward that lanky frame standing there on the end of the pier. Before long, dozens of seagulls have enveloped him, their wings fluttering and flapping wildly.

Ed stands there tossing shrimp to the hungry birds. As he does, if you listen closely, you can hear him say with a smile, 'Thank you. Thank you.'

In a few short minutes the bucket is empty. But Ed doesn't leave. He stands there lost in thought, as though transported to another time and place. Invariably, one of the gull's lands on his sea-bleached, weather-beaten hat – an old military hat he's been wearing for years. When he finally turns around and begins to walk back toward the beach, a few of the birds hop along the pier with him until he gets to the stairs, and then they, too, fly away. And old Ed quietly makes his way down to the end of the beach and on home.

If you were sitting there on the pier with your fishing line in the water, Ed might seem like 'a funny old duck,' as my dad used to say. Or, 'a guy that's a sandwich shy of a picnic,' as my kids might say. To onlookers, he's just another old codger, lost in his own weird world, feeding the seagulls with a bucket full of shrimp. To the onlooker, rituals can look either very strange or very empty. They can seem altogether unimportant.... maybe even a lot of nonsense. Old folks often do strange



things, at least in the eyes of Boomers and Busters. Most of them would probably write Old Ed off, down there in Florida.

That's too bad. They'd do well to know him better. His full name:

Eddie Rickenbacker. He was a famous hero back in World War II. On one of his flying missions across the Pacific, he and his seven-member crew went down. Miraculously, all the men survived, crawled out of their plane, and climbed into a life raft. Captain Rickenbacker and his crew floated for days on the rough waters of the Pacific. They fought the sun. They fought sharks. Most of all, they fought hunger. By the eighth day their rations ran out. No food. No water. They were hundreds of miles from land and no one knew where they were. They needed a miracle.

That afternoon they had a simple devotional service and prayed for a miracle. They tried to nap. Eddie leaned back and pulled his military cap over his nose. Time dragged. All he could hear was the slap of the waves against the raft.

Suddenly, Eddie felt something land on the top of his cap. It was a seagull! Old Ed would later describe how he sat perfectly still, planning his next move. With a flash of his hand and a squawk from the gull, he managed to grab it and wring its neck. He tore the feathers off, and he and his starving crew made a meal – a very slight meal for eight men – of it. Then they used the intestines for bait. With it, they caught fish, which gave them food and more bait.and the cycle continued.

With that simple survival technique, they were able to endure the rigors of the sea until they were found and rescued. (after 24 days at sea...)

Eddie Rickenbacker lived many years beyond that ordeal, but he never forgot the sacrifice of that first lifesaving seagull. And he never stopped saying, 'Thank you.' That's why almost every Friday night he would walk to the end of the pier with a bucket full of shrimp and a heart full of gratitude.

