

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

This Scripture takes us to what is at the HEART OF FAITH – a **DEEP AND PRO-FOUND ABIDING THANKSGIVING**.

I've read other explanations about what happened to the other nine:

1. One waited to see if the cure was real.
2. One waited to see if it would last.
3. One said he would see Jesus later.
4. One decided that he had never had leprosy.
5. One said he would have gotten well anyway.
6. One gave the glory to the priests.
7. One said, "O well, Jesus didn't really do anything."
8. One said, "Any old rabbi could have done it."
9. One said, "I was already starting to improve."

And since the Scripture does not tell us what motivated them to keep on going, we have to look for our own answer.

As I have lived with this scripture, I came to understand that these **other 9 got what they wanted – and went on**. The **one got what he wanted AND stopped to give thanks AND GOT A WHOLE LOT MORE**.

Once upon a time, a Christian was sitting on a park bench, quietly minding his own business – taking time to soak in the beauty of the day and to give thanks, when he was approached by another Christian. Christian #2 said, **"Good afternoon, brother. Tell me, 'Are you saved?'"**

Christian #1 said, **"Yes."**

Now Christian #2 had a burning conviction to make sure everyone was saved, and he also liked to make sure of it (as though he thought that he could) and so he pursued the matter: **“Are you SURE that you’re saved?”**

Christian #1 said, **“Yes.”**

Christian #2, not content with only monosyllabic responses, pressed the matter, thinking that if he asked the one litmus test question, he would know for sure: **“Can you tell me the moment and the day and the place when you were saved?”**

And Christian #1 said, **“Yes, sir, I can. It was on a lonely hill outside of Jerusalem about 2000 years ago.”**

And Christian #2 said, **“Oh! OK! Have a nice day.”** and walked on.

I don’t know if you can identify with either of the Christians in this story, but if we lay over the Gospel lesson, we can see that for nine of these people, they could say when it was that Jesus *saved* them (and the Greek word used in this story translates either as “healed” OR “saved”) but on the next day, or the next, we can pretty surely guess that their response would be, “But what have you done for me lately.”

You see, the **test is not knowing the MOMENT we were saved** – whether we point to that day on Calvary or to a particular moment in our life – but, **rather**, the test is **”WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS IT MADE?”**

The group of nine will talk about *pie in the sky in the sweet by and by*. The other will focus on the *cake by the lake that they’re having right now*.

The key is THANKFULNESS.

So what does that mean to us today?

Perhaps, if we look to how much our lives reflect the choice made by the nine, we can see.

FOR EXAMPLE, when we came to this worship time here, right now, did we come WITH A HEART BENT ON WORSHIP? Or do we primarily come in order to FEEL BETTER? (*Translation: What have you done for me lately?*)

Here's a clue to answer that question: If we leave WORSHIP saying, **“Well, that left me cold.”** Or **“I didn't get anything out of that today; I might as well have stayed at home.”** then **what was our motivation in the first place?**

We can also apply the **same test to the end of each day:** **“Well, this day certainly didn't feel good.”** OR **“What a lousy day; I hope that I can have a better one tomorrow.”**

OR **“Thank you, God, for all the blessings I received today” ... and then NAME THEM.**

Someone once said that **“GRATITUDE [OR THANKSGIVING] IS THE SOIL IN WHICH FAITH TAKES ROOT, AND GROWS, BLOSSOMS, AND BEARS FRUIT.”**

Or – looking at it from the other direction: **“SIN, AT ITS ROOTS, IS INGRATITUDE [NOT GIVING THANKS] – THINKING OF LIFE IN TERMS OF RIGHTS INSTEAD OF SEEING THINGS IN LIFE AS GIFTS.”**

Perhaps that's the reason why it was a Samaritan – one of the outcasts of Jesus' culture – who was the only one who received the blessing as a gift, for which he felt compelled to stop and to give thanks.

Perhaps we who are not outcasts of our world have grown to expect good things so much, we think that we are ENTITLED to them.

It hasn't always been that way. The early pilgrims in the Massachusetts colony in 1621 could have easily had a DAY OF MOURNING gathering, after ½ of their whole shipload had died by that point. However, they chose, instead, to have a DAY OF THANKSGIVING.

It was a good strategy. In the midst of the difficulties that life sometimes gives, the most creative thing a person can do is to identify the good things for which they are grateful.

Henry Ward Beecher put it this way: ***“If one should give me a dish of sand, and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet, and sweep through it, and it would draw to itself the most invisible particles. The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mer-***

cies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find some heavenly blessings.”

This is what is at the center of a vital, living faith – looking for the blessings and giving thanks.

Now, I'll grant you – sometimes it's not always easy. Sometimes, it's much easier to look at what's going wrong. Sometimes are harder than others.

But that is largely DUE TO THE HABITS WE HAVE MADE. If I only exercise once every six months (whether I need it or not) it's pretty hard when I do it. If I only read the Bible or pray when I come to church, instead of daily, it's harder for me to do it meaningfully.

It's the same thing for GIVING THANKS. When we do it DAILY – AND THROUGHOUT EACH DAY – it is EASIER TO DO IT EVERY DAY, REGARDLESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THAT PARTICULAR DAY.

It means that we have to PAY ATTENTION to what's going on RIGHT NOW.

So much of our lives we spend thinking about – and, so often, WORRYING ABOUT – what's going to happen down the road. “What are we going to do when ...?”

The one who was healed, was able to put off what he was going to do later. That one was able to focus on what was happening right now. It was that one who gave thanks.

As I thought back over my life, while I danced with this scripture, I thought about old Cecil. Cecil was a member of a former church. He and I would take walks together in a nearby park. I remember how amazed I would be at all the things that he saw and heard while walking -- things that many of us would simply pass by and not give a bit of notice. Too often, we don't notice them, because we're too busy thinking about some time or some place else other than where we are right now.

Now Cecil certainly had a lot of things on my mind – a wife dying of cancer, his own illness that would end up taking his life, but which he had to put on the back burner while he took care of her, children who had caused him a number of heartaches over the years.

Cecil had had, and was now having, life circumstances that none of us would fault him for having a *good grouch* going on. But that's not anyone ever saw when they spent time with Cecil. Not at all; not at all.

At the HEART OF FAITH is a **DEEP AND PROFOUND ABIDING THANKSGIVING**.

Yes, Christian #1 was right in what he told Christian #2 in the first story I related today. We were saved on a lonely hill outside of Jerusalem about 2000 years ago.

We are reminded each time we celebrate Holy Communion: ***While we were yet sinners, Jesus Christ died for us. That proves God's love for us. In the Name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.***

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord," Paul reminds us.

There is so much for which a living Faith will be thankful. But if we don't look for our blessings, they won't be recognized.

How about you? Have you been looking for your blessings and giving thanks regularly? It's what FAITH is all about, much more so than whether you happen to agree with the right set of beliefs.

It's not only what FAITH is about. It's the only way that we can live the life that Jesus came to give us – ABUNDANTLY and ETERNALLY. The only life you can live is not in the past; it's not in the future ("just as soon as you ...") It's in the **MOMENT OF RIGHT NOW**. Give thanks. And live.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.