

October 9, 2016

PRAYER

Let the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

One of the things we see over and over again in the scriptures is that God is a God that wants us to be whole, that wants us to be healthy. We see God heal many throughout the Old and New Testaments. We have two of those stories this morning in the readings and they have some very interesting similarities. The first in the Old Testament 2nd Kings Naaman has leprosy, he is not a Jew but is told by one of the slaves who was taken in a raid that if he were to go to Israel that he could be healed from his leprosy. And so he goes. His commander sends him, sending a letter first which scares the king to death. He's thinks that they're picking a fight because if he's not healed what are the ramifications? And of course Elisha is the one who says, "What are you worried about?"

This is God, God can do this and God will do this. Have him come to me and so Naaman comes, a great warrior he comes in his chariot and he comes with his entourage if you will. And Elisha doesn't even come out of the house. Elisha sends his servants out. Go out and tell Naaman to go and wash seven times in the river Jordan and he will be healed. One would think that that would make Naaman happy. He insists, "What, he didn't even come out! I thought I'd get a show! He should of at least come out, called upon God to heal me. And it would be great, wouldn't it? He wants me to go wash in some crummy old river here in Israel. We have better rivers in Damascus. This is crazy!" He's mad, he's angry. Luckily he has some servants who keep their head. So now Father if he had told you to do something difficult to be healed, wouldn't you have done that? Yeah, I mean that's, I would have done something then. Well isn't it so much easier just to go and wash in the river, and see what happens? What have you got to lose? If he's right, you're going to be healed. If he's wrong, you will just have been in the Jordan River seven times, and you can go back home. Then you can pick a fight with their king. So he goes, he washes. Amazing enough, he is healed of leprosy. And his first act after that is to go back to Elisha's home to thank him and to proclaim indeed the only God of the Earth is here in Israel.

That's quite a proclamation for someone who doesn't know the history, the covenant. The only God of the Earth is right here in Israel. Now in the gospel reading for this morning we have a different story with some things that are pretty much alike. We have ten lepers and we're told that Jesus is between the area of Galilee and Samaria. He's on his way to Jerusalem. Well as you know Samaria was not very friendly with Israel at the time. They believed differently about where was proper to worship God. Samaritans on the mountain in Samaria, the Jews in the temple in Jerusalem. But when you got leprosy and you are ostracized by society whether you are a Samaritan or a Jew. You band together because you weren't allowed to be around other people. They didn't know much about leprosy at the time. They didn't know how contagious it was and so they would send the people with leprosy off to live together. They could at least support one another.

And so we have ten lepers, we are assuming nine were Jews one was a Samaritan. They have heard about Jesus; they have heard about some of the healings that he has done. And Jesus has healed in different ways. He has healed from a distance when people would come and say, "My child is sick and

dying, won't you come?" And he simply says, "Your child is healed." They go home and sure enough their child is healed. Other times Jesus simply speaks a word and the person is healed. In one case, a person touches the hem of his robe and they are healed. In another case, Jesus spits on the ground, takes the mud that's made and puts it on the blind man's eyes and they are healed. So Jesus has healed in many different ways. So the lepers come from a distance because they had to. They were not allowed to come in contact with people, when they did that on the road, they were commanded to cover their face and to cry out from a distance, "Unclean, unclean." So that the people wouldn't come upon them and become ritually unclean because they had come into contact with them.

So they yelled at Jesus, "Jesus, Master have mercy on us, heal us." And then Jesus says, "Go show yourself to the priest, you will be healed." So it's not an instantaneous healing. Go show yourself to the priest like go and wash in the Jordan River but on the way they're cleansed. They are healed. The leprosy is gone. Now we can only assume again, it doesn't say in the reading, that if this Samaritan realized that he was clean, everybody else did as well. They keep going, one turns back to thank Jesus. Now the more I thought about that the more I thought if I had been in that group and Jesus had told me to go and show myself to the priest and I would be healed. Then I don't care when I was healed, I was going to go show myself to the priest. That seemed like it was part of the deal. So I have compassion for those nine because I would have been walking right alongside of them. I would have gone to show myself to the priest so I could be declared clean. And then if I could find Jesus or if we came back into contact because they were a pretty good walk from Jerusalem at that point. They may never have seen him again even though he was heading for Jerusalem. So I had to confess that I most likely would have been one of the nine that kept walking.

But the Samaritan turns around, he is so grateful that he has been healed, that he can rejoin his family, that he can rejoin society, that he is moved to turn around. To not follow completely the instructions that Jesus had given all ten of them to go back and thank Jesus and to praise God. And interestingly enough, Jesus says, "Well, were all ten of you cleansed, healed? Where are the other nine?" It kind of hurts that I would have been chastised for following Jesus first directions. But it really got me to think about gratitude. It really got me to think about giving thanks, and recognizing what is done for me by God. But also by others. And the more I thought about thankfulness and gratitude the more I realized that I am much more prone to give thanks or even to recognize the act or the gift after the fact. Sometimes in the midst of the cares, the concerns of living life. I am not always really good at recognizing the gifts that I'm given by God or by others. Sometimes it just seems like the normal course, sometimes I'm just too caught up in whatever it is I'm dealing with to recognize that things are going in a right direction. Not because of what I have done but because of what somebody else has done or because of what God has done.

The more I thought about that, the more I thought about my family. I think probably like most of us we don't recognize immediately all that our family does for us. My mother and father were Charles and Mary were really good people. And I don't know that I ever as a child recognized how good they were, how caring they were, how loving they were, how willing to do whatever they could for their children. I just took that for granted. I know I've said before, I simply assumed that everybody had parents like that. That gave what they could, they didn't give everything that my sister and I wanted all the time. And that was probably for our own good. I didn't recognize, certainly as child, that my father was working all these swing shifts and things like that in order to provide for his family so that we could be educated. I certainly didn't appreciate when he told me I had to go to take summer classes at college

immediately after graduating high school. I did not appreciate what he was doing there because I wanted my summer off. And even though as I got older as I became a more mature adult and understood kind of what sacrifices he and my mother made for us I never thanked him. I never went to him and acknowledged what he had done for me. And that changed the Monday before Thanksgiving in 1995. While he and my mother were visiting my sister in South Carolina, my father had a major heart attack. I was told that night and told that he'd probably wouldn't live through the night. I made arrangements to fly, I was the priest at St. Peters in Bon Secour Alabama in this diocese back then. And I made arrangements to fly to Charleston, South Carolina, that's where he would be in the hospital if he survived. Otherwise, I'd have to go on up to Georgetown where my sister lived. And luckily my father survived that night and I was able to see him. As a matter of fact, he surprisingly to the doctors improved some. And so I spent the next three weeks at the hospital in Charleston. My mother at that point had several back operations and she was getting around on a walker. And she simply could not stay at the hospital day and night. So I did. My sister couldn't do it either. So I did. And for three weeks I was in that hospital and as hard as it was it did give me the opportunity and was enough of a wake up to acknowledge to myself first all that he had done for me. And in those dark hours of the late night, early morning, many times he was not able to sleep and we would talk and it gave me an opportunity to express the gratitude that I felt for all that he had done for me. It was a great gift from God to be able to do that.

It wasn't that I didn't love him or tell him that I loved him, it was just I needed to share with him how much I appreciated him, all he had done for me. And that I really did understand that he had done great things and made sacrifices for me and for my sister. And to thank him for that. Obviously it still touches me. After I had been there for three weeks it was time to get back to my church. You know between Thanksgiving and Christmas, you only got about four weeks, had to get back, had to get back to my congregation, he was doing a little bit better. And so I had to leave but I left with a heart that had acknowledged what he had done for me. We had said to each other what we needed to say to each other.

And especially as I was flying home, my prayers to God were again gratitude because I was given the opportunity to share with my father and I'm convinced it was God that gave me that opportunity and I needed to thank God for that. December 23 of that year, it was a Saturday, I got a phone call from my mother that he had passed. And it was hard but it was also with the knowledge that we had shared what we needed to share and that was a great gift.

I share that story because I think I'm not unique in the fact that sometimes it takes a while to recognize the gifts that we have been given by others and by God. And how important it is to take the opportunities once we recognize, realize that we sincerely thank those who have been a part of our lives who have helped us in times that were difficult. That we didn't even realize that they were making such an impact, that they saw us through some difficulties, that they saw us make sure that we made the right choices, that we stayed on the path that we needed to be on. It's like the Samaritan, it's important for us when we recognize that to turn around and to express that gratitude. That is part of what we do when we come to the service, the Eucharist, the word Eucharist means thanksgiving. We are coming here to express our thankfulness for what God has done for us, and in us, and through us. And we never know when our time here will end, for those we love or for those who have had an impact in our lives. So this morning I just encourage you to share the gratitude that is a part of you that you just haven't had the opportunity or taken the time to express. Share it with those who have made an impact

on your life and don't forget to not take God for granted. Each day we go through making our decisions and following our way. And it's hard sometimes to give thanks each day for the gift of that day that comes from God. But it is gift and it is for us to have a grateful heart, to be thankful to the one who gives life, the one who has redeemed life, and the one who sustains life. It is for us to live a life of gratitude, not because others expect it but because in showing our gratitude we are showing that they have loved us. And they weren't looking for that acknowledgement but what a difference it makes when it's expressed and received. It is the day for gratitude, it is the day for thanksgiving, let us celebrate and acknowledge it.