

Thanksgiving 2022

Have You Forgotten Something?

I can recall three rhetorical questions that accompanied me throughout my childhood.

The **first** was, "Were you born in a barn?" That usually came when I left a door open, or didn't clean up my room.

The **second** was, "When will you ever grow up?" which was a question my sisters asked me as a carefully planned, relentless program of persecution.

The third one was, "**Have you forgotten something?**" That was the parental admonition, usually for not saying thank you after receiving some gift.

This last question is what I thought of when I read the New Testament lesson for this morning from Luke's gospel, the seventeenth chapter, the story of Jesus healing ten lepers. Only one comes back to give thanks. Ten were healed, but only the Samaritan came back. If my mother had been there, she would have said to the nine, "Have you forgotten something?" (by Mark Trotter from *How about Something Different?*)

Greg Anderson, in *Living Life on Purpose*, tells a story about a man whose wife had left him. He was completely depressed. He had lost faith in himself, in other people, in God--he found no joy in living. One rainy morning this man went to a small neighborhood restaurant for breakfast. Although several people were at the diner, no one was speaking to anyone else. Our miserable friend hunched over the counter, stirring his coffee with a spoon. In one of the small booths along the window was a young mother with a little girl. They had just been served their food when the little girl broke the sad silence by almost shouting, "Momma, why don't we say our prayers here?" The waitress who had just served their breakfast turned around and said, "Sure, honey, we pray here. Will you say the prayer for us?" And she turned and looked at the rest of the people in the restaurant and said, "Bow your heads." Surprisingly, one by one, the heads went down. The little girl then bowed her head, folded her hands, and said, "God is great, God is good, and we thank him for our food. Amen."

That prayer changed the entire atmosphere. People began to talk with one another. The waitress said, "We should do that every morning." "All of a sudden," said our friend, "my whole frame of mind started to improve. From that little girl's example, I started to thank God for all that I did have and stop majoring in all that I didn't have. I started to be grateful."

We all understand and appreciate the importance of gratitude. How it can radically change relationships. In fact, one of the first things we were taught and that we teach our children is to express their gratitude. Some one gives them some candy and we say: "Now what do you say?" And the child learns from an early age the answer "Thank you." And certainly we all know as adults that we appreciate being thanked.

Yet, when it comes to giving thanks to our heavenly father, we so often miss the mark. And when it comes to giving our thanks to God, I don't suppose there is any story in the Bible that is

so endearing to us, so timelessly appropriate, as the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers. We have all heard the story many times, but like so many Bible stories, we never tire of it. The story begins: "And as he entered a certain village there met him ten lepers, and they stood at a far distance." Don't ever think for a moment that death is the worst thing that can happen to a person.

It's not. And the scene this morning is a case in point. These ten men walked the earth. They breathed and ate. They had hopes and fears and aspirations and feelings just like you and me. Yet, there was a tragic sense in which they were already dead. They were walking dead. Leprosy was the most dreaded of all ancient diseases. It ate away at the body and left its victim maimed and disfigured. There was no known cure. In their hopes for a family life, a useful occupation, plans for the future-they were dead men. Their situation was made worse because leprosy was believed to be highly contagious. Actually, we know today that it is not. But tell that to ancient superstition. The scripture made it quite clear that as these lepers approached Jesus they stood at a far distance. Jewish law clearly prescribed that a leper could not get within fifty yards of a clean person. Everywhere these poor men journeyed they heard familiar words yelled out: "Unclean," "Leper." And then some would hurl stones at them to keep them away. Leprosy was a serious public health concern but it was tinged with the religious element of ritual uncleanness. So it was that they not only had to live with their physical handicap, but they were also isolated.

They had to live in the hell of loneliness. That can do more to drain a person's energy for living than the most horrible of diseases. But even in the midst of this horrible situation these lepers had something to be thankful for. In their common misery they had banded together. They had found each other.

It is interesting to note that one of these ten lepers was a Samaritan. Now a good Jew in that day in time would have no dealings at all with a Samaritan. They looked upon Samaritans as dogs.

Yet, in the common misery of their leprosy these men had forgotten that they were Jew and Samaritan and realized only that they were men in need. Some of you might say, well it was a case of misery loves company. Maybe so.

But I know that there is power in fellowship, especially the fellowship of people who have a common need. Even lepers found it so. Which, I think, brings us to the point of the story, which is simply this: even in the midst of our problems....

1. There is always something to be thankful for.
2. Thanksgiving needs to be expressed.