

Sermon Notes

Your thankfulness has made you well (Luke 17:11-19)

Jerry Truex; November 20, 2011

I. Introduction

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

"The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."¹

Today I'm going to talk about thanksgiving; that is, the importance of having a *thankful or grateful heart*. We will look at the story of Jesus' *Healing of the Ten Lepers* and see that obedience leads to physical salvation, but only gratitude allows one enjoy that salvation here-and-now. Then I will suggest ways that we can cultivate an attitude of gratitude or, following the old Cherokee's advice, how to feed the good wolf within.

II. The Healing of the Ten Lepers

Luke 17:11-19. ¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, 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 made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Luke 17:11-19 . ¹¹ Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ αὐτὸς διήρχετο διὰ μέσον Σαμαρείας καὶ Γαλιλαίας. ¹² Καὶ εἰσερχομένου αὐτοῦ εἷς τινα κώμην ἀπήντησαν [αὐτῷ] δέκα λεπροὶ ἄνδρες, οἱ ἕστησαν πόρρωθεν ¹³ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἦσαν φωνὴν λέγοντες· Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς. ¹⁴ καὶ ἰδὼν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πορευθέντες ἐπιδείξατε ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτοὺς ἐκαθαρίσθησαν. ¹⁵ εἷς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἰδὼν ὅτι ἰάθη, ὑπέστρεψεν μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάζων τὸν θεόν, ¹⁶ καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ εὐχαριστῶν αὐτῷ· καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Σαμαρίτης. ¹⁷ ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· οὐχὶ οἱ δέκα ἐκαθαρίσθησαν; οἱ δὲ ἐννέα ποῦ; ¹⁸ οὐχὲν εὐρέθησαν ὑποστρέψαντες δοῦναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀλλογενὴς οὗτος; ¹⁹ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἀναστὰς πορεύου· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.

¹ Barbara L. Fredrickson, *Positivity* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009) 179.

The story is set on the borders between Galilee and Samaria. It is an episode located within the Luke's "long journey narrative" where he depicts Jesus and his disciples walking from Galilee to Jerusalem. Whereas Mark has three chapters depicting Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Mark 8:27-11:1), Luke has ten (Luke 9:51-19:45).

In this way, Luke Gospel emphasizes what it means to walk with Jesus; that is, what it means to follow Jesus. As such, the journey to Jerusalem becomes a teaching tool for discipleship.

In this episode of the *Healing of the Ten Lepers*, discipleship entails calling out to Jesus, obeying Jesus, and giving gratitude to God. In a word, this story teaches us the importance of *gratitude*.

1. Call out to Jesus (v. 13)

Here we have ten lepers calling out to Jesus. Leprosy (Hansen's disease) is a disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*, which infects the upper respiratory tract and peripheral nerves. Skin lesions are the primary external sign and it can cause extreme disfigurement.

Moses gave the following instructions regarding leprosy.

Lev. 13:45-46. ⁴⁵ The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." ⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (NRSV)

Moses also gave elaborate instructions about cleaning the houses of lepers and elaborate instructions about ritual cleansing for people with such skin diseases. When we consider Moses' instruction, we understand why the ten lepers are outside the city, keeping their distance, and didn't approach Jesus.

In ancient Judaism, one of the signs of the messianic age was the cure of leprosy. In Luke 7:19, the disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus if he is "the one." Jesus responded in 7:22.

Luke 7:22 And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. (NRSV).

So, the cure of leprosy was a sign that the messianic age had come and the story of the Healing of the Ten Lepers demonstrates that messianic age has come, that Jesus is the Messiah.

Notice in the story that the ten lepers take the initiative. Jesus was not searching for them; rather, they call out to Jesus. This story invites us to take the same kind of initiative. Over and over, Luke's Gospel encourages the reader to seek God's help.

Luke 11:9-10. ⁹ "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (NRSV)

What did the lepers shout out?

Luke 17:13. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (NRSV)

Luke 17:13. Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς.

This is one of several places in the NT where we get what is called, "The Jesus Prayer."²

Short form: "Lord, have mercy!" – *Kyrie elēson*.

Long form: "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

It fulfills the injunction to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation.

Rom. 10:13. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (NRSV)

Joel 2:32a. Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved (NRSV)

Ever since the beginning of the church, Christians have been encouraged to say this short prayer repeatedly throughout the day. The early desert fathers and mothers encouraged their disciples to say the Jesus Prayer to induce contemplative prayer, known as the "prayer of the heart," or "the prayer of the mind in the heart."³ It should be said with right intention (Heb. *kavanah*) and proper concentration. "According to Bishop Ignatti [1807-67], it should take about half an hour to say the Jesus prayer a hundred times."⁴

Praying the Jesus Prayer—"Lord, have mercy!"—requires humility and humility is the essence of being human; "humility is to the Christian what enlightenment is for the Buddhist and realization is for the Hindu."⁵ For the Christian, humility is surrender or submission to God; nonattached trust in God. The Jesus prayer can only be said with humility.

² See Luke 18:13, 38; Matt. 9:29; 20:31. Compare with texts about calling on the name of the Lord: Acts 4:10-12; Phil 2:9-11; Rom. 10:9-13; John 16:24.

³ So Timothy Ware in the preface to Ignumen Chariton (ed.), *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1966) 21.

⁴ Ignumen Chariton (ed.), *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1966) 34.

⁵ Mary Margaret Funk, *Humility Matters for Practicing the Spiritual Life* (New York: Continuum, 2001) 9.

To call on Jesus in this way is, in the words of the old Cherokee, “feeding the good wolf.”

To sum up point #1: We are to take the initiative and pray: “Jesus have mercy on us.”

2. Obey Jesus (v. 14b)

Jesus gives the command to the ten lepers, “Show yourselves to the priests,” and they act on that. They went. They obeyed (v. 14).

According to the Law of Moses, a person cured of leprosy was to go to the priest, who would inspect the person to see if there was any sign of the disease and, if not, then instruct the person how to perform the ritual cleansing. Once that had taken place, the person could be reintegrated into society.

Normally, a person would go to the priest after they had been cured, but in this story, Jesus tells them to go BEFORE they have been cured. It was “a test of faith and obedience.”⁶

Notice that the cure took place at a distance. Jesus didn’t go and touch them, as he does in other instances. In fact, the lepers take off without being healed—“after they went, they were made clean,” ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτοὺς ἐκαθαρίσθησαν (14b)—Jesus was absent when they were healed. Jesus heals at a distance, even when absent.

What is important to see is that the Lepers’ *faith* is shown in their *obedience*.⁷ They demonstrate *faithful obedience* and *obedient faith*. They obey and then, on the way, they are cured. They participated in the salvation process.

In this way, Luke shows that we contribute something to our own healing.⁸ We have a role to play in our own healing, restoration, or salvation. We must participate in our own salvation.

Notice that *only when* they obeyed Jesus’ word were they *able to see* they had been cured.⁹ They obeyed and then they could see.

To sum up point #2: If we obey Jesus as we understand him (v. 14), our eyes will be opened and we will see (v. 15).

⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 651.

⁷ “Their faith was shown in their obedience to Christ’ command, and on the way their cure took place.” Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to Saint Luke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Original 1896; Fifth Edition, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1922) 405.

⁸ “The Lepers are required to act as though doing what Jesus asked would make a difference, even though there was yet no tangible evidence that it would.” John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Volume 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1993) 846.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 648.

3. Your faith (*pistis*) has made you well (*sesōken*)

ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.

Verse 19 enshrines Jesus' final pronouncement. Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well."

First, I want to comment on the word "faith" (*pistis*). As we have seen, the lepers' obedience brought healing. Now Jesus characterizes their obedience as "faith." In the Jewish mind, there is really no difference between faith and obedience. The Apostle Paul uses the terms interchangeably.

Second, I want to comment on the word "has made well" (*sesōken*). The word for "has made you well" comes from the Greek word *sōdzō*, which is usually translated "to save." Again, in the Jewish mind, there is little difference between physical healing and salvation, although in English the term "salvation" has a broader connotation.

Obedying Jesus, putting faith in Jesus is, in the words of the old Cherokee, is "feeding the good wolf."

To sum up point #3: Faithful obedience leads to healing.

4. Give glory/thanks to God (v. 15-16)

Now I want to look at verse 15-16, which highlight the main point of the story.

Luke 17:15-16. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. (NRSV)

Only one of the lepers— the Samaritan (v. 16), the "foreigner" (v. 18)—turned back or returned to Jesus. Why? To glorify God and to thank Jesus.

The fact that only one of the ten returns to praise God and to thank Jesus, highlights the Samaritan's attitude; it's a crucial point we don't want to miss. The Samaritan obeyed, like the other lepers, but in addition he had the right attitude—the attitude of gratitude.

His faithful obedience brought physical healing, but his gratitude brought him into the presence of Jesus. He had a double win; physical healing and communion with God.

Gratitude takes us beyond being cured of something; gratitude changes our perspective, our inner orientation, to a state beyond physical cure.

Give glory and thanks to God is, in the words of the old Cherokee, "feeding the good wolf."

To sum up #4: Give thanks/gratitude to God.

Now I want to narrow our focus and talk about giving thanks or gratitude to God

III. Giving Thanks/Gratitude to God

A. Gratitude: The Doorway to Love

To draw on a horticultural metaphor: Love does not flower in the absence of fertilization and cultivation. "Love is nourished by supportive attitudes such as gratitude. Gratitude bestows many benefits."¹⁰

On the one hand, gratitude dissolves negative feelings." Gratitude melts anger and jealousy; it shrinks fear and defensiveness.

On the other hand, gratitude also evokes positive feelings, which is itself a healing and beneficial emotion. When we grateful, we like other people; we even love other people. In this way, "gratitude is a gift to everyone."¹¹

The Apostle Paul wrote:

1 Thess. 5:16-18. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (NRSV)

Like other attitudes, gratitude can be cultivated. We don't have to wait for some inspirational moment (which usually doesn't happen).

Here are some ways we can cultivate gratitude by saying the Jesus Prayer, by ritualizing gratitude, doing a gratitude visit (meditation), and three blessings.

¹⁰ Roger Walsh, *Essential Spirituality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999) 99.

¹¹ Roger Walsh, *Essential Spirituality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999) 99.

B. The Jesus Prayer

The early church fathers and mothers thought the best way to cultivate gratitude and the presence of Jesus was to say the Jesus Prayer as often as possible.

C. Ritualize Gratitude ¹²

Saying Grace. On ancient, time tested way to cultivate gratitude is to say grace or offer thanks at every meal. Like the Samaritan leper, it is a way to glorify God and give thanks to Jesus for the good things that God/Jesus has done in your life. Saying grace is a spiritual discipline. If you haven't done it in a while, it will seem awkward, but once you start and keep the habit going, it will elevate your spiritual happiness.

Thanksgiving Day. Having an entire day set apart for thankfulness is another way to cultivate gratitude. Of course, our American Thanksgiving Day acts out an attitude of gratitude. Thanksgiving Day is of national recognition that we have been blessed by God. Collectively we are called to recognize God's blessings and grace.

D. Gratitude Visit ¹³

A meditative way to realize gratitude is to recall helpful people in your life. Close your eyes, sit quietly, and recall someone you love or has helped you. Visit that person in your mind. Thank them for what they have contributed to your life and then thank God for that person.

An alternative is to write a "gratitude letter" to someone.

E. Three Blessings ¹⁴

Each night, before you go to bed, write down three things that went well today and why they went well. Next to each positive event, answer the question "Why did this happen?" You should find much to be grateful for.

IV. Conclusion

We are caught in a battle between good and evil. The battle is within us. Who wins the battle depends on who you feed. Do you feed the good wolf or the evil wolf within?

To feed the good wolf, according to the story of the *Healing of the Ten Lepers*, we can do three things:

¹² Barbara L. Fredrickson, *Positivity* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009) 210-11.

¹³ Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York: Free Press, 2011) 30-31.

¹⁴ Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York: Free Press, 2011) 33-35.

1. Take the initiative and pray: "Lord, have mercy."
2. Obey Jesus as you understand him, then you will see the cure that God offers.
3. Give thanks/gratitude to God.