



And what happened for him in this act of giving thanks in a tangible way is that his life was changed. And he ended up writing a book he called 365 Thank You: The Year a Simple Act of Gratitude Changed My Life.

Some of what changed were his outward circumstances; but more important was what happened for him inside. He began to see the blessings in some of the “bad” things that had happened to him. He was brought out of himself and his own self-centeredness. Old wounds began to be healed. His relationships with others are deepened. And some of the people around him took to writing thank you notes, also, and spread the blessing.

It’s become a popular book; mostly its received positive reviews. One reviewer slammed it a bit, saying that they wished Kralik had spent more time writing about his interaction with the persons who’d received the notes. But that’s a criticism that misses the point. The power of thanksgiving, Kralik discovered, is given more to the one who gives thanks than to the one who receives it. And while it may be that the one to whom we give thanks is grateful for the expression, it’s in us—the “thanks givers”—that the spirit of gratitude grows and its blessings are released. The subtitle of the book is telling: giving thanks may have changed someone else’s life, but it certainly changed his. Give thanks, and something happens to us.

So there once were ten lepers who didn’t want to be lepers anymore. They didn’t want to be sick, and they didn’t want what their sickness did to them. They didn’t want to be removed from relationship...which is what leprosy did in the ancient world...they didn’t want to be all alone.

So one day Jesus came through town. Maybe they’d heard about him; maybe not. Regardless, maybe he could make them well. So they cry out; they get his attention. It was a gutsy action. Rabbis don’t want to have too much to do with lepers. All that “unclean” business, you know. But apparently nothing else seemed to have worked, and sometimes amazing things happen when there’s nothing left to lose, so they give it a try.

Now, you’ll notice that he doesn’t wave his hand over them. Really, he doesn’t do anything at all while they’re with him. He just tells them to go show themselves to the priest...an action one was to do when one had been cleansed of leprosy.

Now to their credit, these fellows are obedient. They do what Jesus tells them to do. All ten of them. What Jesus does while they are in their presence is act as if they are already healed, and then in going to the priests they act as if they are already healed. And so on their way they are cleansed, and they are lepers no more.

Now if this story were just about the healing of the leprosy, that’s where the story would stop. But because God desires for us something even greater than what they’ve already received, the story continues...

One of them...when he saw he had been healed...came back. And he shouted again...but this time, not to ask but to give praise and thanks. And he was a Samaritan...and we’ve spent enough time in the scriptures to know that means he’s an outsider; he’s not part of Israel; he doesn’t really know God the way the rest of the Hebrews know God.

And after wondering out loud about the other nine, here’s what Jesus says to him: “Get up and go on your way: your faith has made you well.”

Now let’s pause here a moment and do some Bible, because there’s something a little bit odd here. Here’s what’s odd: All ten of them have been made well, including this Samaritan. They’re all well. They’re all healed; including the Samaritan. So when the Samaritan returns to Jesus, he is already healed of his leprosy. So what could it mean here that Jesus says after the

man returns “your faith has made you well?” What is Jesus doing here, because already the man is well? What more could happen for this Samaritan?

Now here’s one answer...that Jesus is simply giving a fuller explanation of what happened earlier in the story when all ten of the lepers were healed. That might be a possibility, but I don’t think so...and I’m going to tell you why, so hang with me for a little bit...

In the middle of the story, when it says that the Samaritan saw he was healed, the word used is the word “ioamai,” which simply means “to be cured.” It’s a standard word to describe someone who was sick no longer being sick. But at the end of the story, when Jesus says that the Samaritan’s faith has made him “well,” the word translated as “well” is “sozo.” And that’s the word that elsewhere, we translate as “salvation;” to be saved. In fact, if you go home and look in your Bibles you may see that your translation says “your faith has saved you.”

And here’s my point...and what I think is at least part of what this story proclaims...that the Samaritan’s act of coming back to give thanks releases upon him something even greater than having his body healed. It releases upon him blessings that are so beyond his imagination that the only word capable of gathering them all in is the word “salvation.” This sacrifice of thanksgiving opens up to him something even greater. That maybe in giving thanks in a tangible way; in a way that matters, and is a little bit disruptive in our lives...God does something incredible that honors the offering; even that there is power in the practice of gratitude, and giving thanks...in the Samaritan’s case, where there was something obvious to give thanks for; but also, even, in Kralik’s case, where there wasn’t.

So we’ve given thanks for some things in the common life God has given us...ministries; service; fellowship; salvation. Over 100 of us responded, and we’re going to find some way to hear what more of us said when asked to give thanks for what God has given us. And over these weeks we’re asking one another to make an offering to our common life; make a common offering, and release back some of what God has given us; an offering of our entire selves; our time, and talent, and treasure.

And we do this because it’s a powerful ministry God has charged us with. Again, it is nothing less than bringing restoration, transformation, and healing to our neighborhoods and the world. To help others love God. We need one another; we need our offerings; the fullness of our service depends on our response to what God has done for us.

But more fundamentally than all that, we do this common act of offering ourselves...of giving thanks...to practice giving thanks...to practice living with open hands...because of what the practice of gratitude does in each of us and all of us; and because coming back to give thanks in a way that matters and makes us stop...writing God a little thank you note with our lives...is a fruitful path to the rich life God gives. Because it is, we all know, for God and for others that we exist.

So it’s good to be a Samaritan, isn’t it...

Especially when we come back to thank God.

So I want to remind us of how much we are already like the Samaritan. Because every week, what we do here together is come back to Jesus to give thanks. Remember that the name we give to our worship...specifically what we do at this table...is “the Holy Eucharist.” That’s what we call our worship. And we all need to know that the word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving.” That’s what the word means. When we come forward to the table...with all we are and all we have, bringing our victories and failures, our joys and our concerns...we’re doing exactly what the Samaritan does, and living a life of gratitude. We’re coming to the place where we find Jesus, and where he waits for us, and strengthens us, and sends us on our way to follow

him...and give our thanks...so that, among other things, we walk into what's next in our day with the spirit of gratitude..which blesses not just us, but others, as well...strengthened, and released, and ready to be shared.

So you know the last words we say in worship every week? "Thanks be to God!" That's a prayer, everybody, so today let's say it like we mean it.

And between now and then, I invite you to a practice. In a few minutes when we come forward to this table, standing in line and bumping into one another, consider what it is you want to thank God for; what your gratitude list looks like.

And then, when we're receiving, just offer a little prayer...silently or aloud, it doesn't make much difference..."Thank you, Lord." We make the offering of thank you, and see what kind of transformation happens. For both Kralik and the Samaritan, it meant more of the life God intended for them...that's for sure. And if that's what God gave them, hardly would God give us anything less.