

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 19, 2020
“OPEN MIC: IS THIS THING ON?”

The Litany
Based on Psalm 105

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within us.

*As we come in God’s name to worship,
may we see how God satisfies us with good and steadfast love.*

**Let us not forget God’s benefits who forgives our iniquities,
heals our hearts, and redeems us from lost places.**

*Let us sing of God’s praises, tell of the Lord’s wonderful works,
and give glory to God’s holy name.*

Let those who seek the Lord rejoice!

**For our God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger
and abounding in steadfast love, faithful to a thousand generations.**

We often pray that you, O Lord, will come to us.

*Yet you, O Lord, are already there, hiding in plain sight,
working for the vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.*

**Reveal yourself to us, giving us eyes of gratitude so that we can discover
what you are doing as we may do your will. Amen.**

Song of Focus
Your Faith Has Made You Well
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. Lord, I’ve heard the story of how you were on the way
to face the trials of Jerusalem when, on a single day,
you encountered ten poor lepers, and each from you sought
healing from the pain and heartache that this disease had brought.
2. And through your compassion, all ten of them were healed!
Only one returned to you, and then with a thankful heart, he kneeled.
With warm tears of thanksgiving, at your feet he fell
you told him, “Rise and go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

Refrain:

O Christ, my blessings multiply when I bow before your feet!
And I remember them in gratitude; my healing is complete.
All praise and hallelujah! In thanksgiving, my heart swells!

You tell me, "Rise and go in grace, for your faith has made you well."

3. Lord, I have received so much, then I simply go my way,
and the joy of all my blessings is gone within the day!
Then I remember all your gifts with thankful heart imbued,
and the joy I've known through all you've shown always grows with gratitude!

Refrain:

O Christ, my blessings multiply when I bow before your feet!
And I remember them in gratitude; my healing is complete.
All praise and hallelujah! In thanksgiving, my heart swells!
You tell me, "Rise and go in grace, for your faith has made you well."

The Scripture **Luke 17:11-19**

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

The Message **Open Mic: Is This Thing On?** **Mark Briley**

Synopsis: Researchers have noted that positive emotions wear off quickly. Dr. Robert Emmons suggests that our emotional systems like newness. They like novelty. They like change. We adapt to positive life circumstances so that before too long, the new car, the new relationship, the new house doesn't feel so new and exciting anymore. Gratitude, however, makes us appreciate the value of something. Valuing something presses beyond emotion and allows us to extract more benefits from it without us taking it for granted. Gratitude propels us to participate more fully in our lives. We become more present to the small things, the moments of grace and beauty that we may have previously overlooked. We become participants in the world, not simply spectators.

Jesus once healed a group of ten people suffering from leprosy. Only one felt value enough in the healing to stop, be present in the moment, and say thank you. He was

alive in a new way. If your life was a microphone and you tapped the top of it, would it be on?

"Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice." (Luke 17:15)



Easter candy during the pandemic is of the devil, don't you think? I am a sucker for those Reese's eggs – and now they put Reese's Pieces inside of the peanut butter cup itself. Lord have mercy. I did get a little chuckle out of this picture I saw that included the line: *"You've had 85 years to work at this, Reese's. Figure it out..."* Of course, if



you're a veteran Reese's fan like me, you know you never eat them right away. You put them in the freezer. Once frozen, they always peel off the paper clean, and the joy is overflowing. But the candy has to go. Just another reality of this isolated time, I suppose. It's apparently also a reality that shirt sales are up during this lock-down while pant sales are at an all-time low. I can't verify this statistically, but the clear thought is that with all meetings happening virtually these days, people still need dress shirts for video but are

totally fine wearing pajama bottoms under their desks. Oh, the things we are learning about ourselves these days. We're learning new ways of saying *"Thank you,"* too.

"Thank you" is one of the first things we learn to say as humans, of course. By far one of the most commonly used phrases in the English language. The average American says, *"Thank you,"* 2,000 times a year. Research suggests, however, that more than half of the time, we don't mean it. How is that measured, I wondered. I'm not sure. I get the sentiment though. *"Thank you"* can easily become simple, transitional speech – ending an encounter – more so than taking to heart the gratitude we are theoretically to feel in such a time. What is gratitude then? Science weighs in on the matter.

Dr. Robert Emmons,¹ a leading scientific expert on gratitude, argues that there are two key parts to gratitude. First, gratitude is an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that

¹ <https://www.njlifehacks.com/thanks-robert-emmons-book-summary/>. Dr. Emmons research and findings included in this message come from this source as well as others where he says similar things.

there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received. Second, we recognize that the source of this goodness is outside of ourselves. As people of faith, we point to God as our source of "*every good and perfect gift*" and that "*all things work together for good*" when God's love is at the center of the effort.

Gratitude. How are you doing with gratitude in these days when gratitude may not be our initial reaction during a global pandemic? Such will be the focus of our three-week stewardship series grounded in the practice of gratitude and filtered through this idea of the "*Open Mic*."

I'm grateful for the Coil family's testimony this morning and look forward to others that will follow in the next couple of weeks. Barb McLay, our Stewardship Team Lead this season, wrote a beautiful word in last week's E-news as well. Please go back and check that out if you missed it. The hope of this series is for you to think of your very life as an *Open Mic*. You have a voice; you have a stage; you have an audience; no matter who you are. If you've ever been a roadie for a band or set up a sound system for some event, there's always that moment when you check all the wires to ensure they are properly connected, you turn up the volume to ensure the channel is open and live, and then you walk up to that mic, tap the top of it and say, "*Is this thing on?*"

That's what we want to know about your life, and mine, as part of this series – Is your life, you own personal open mic, is it on? If so, what are you saying? Is your voice focused on a judgmental rant? Are you spewing challenge or encouragement? What? And perhaps most poignantly, are you a voice of gratitude in our polarized and hurting world?

Jesus had more than a few thoughts about what our lives should say to the world. Gratitude was near the top. On one occasion, as Jesus was making his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered the village, ten men suffering from leprosy hollered at Jesus from a distance. It was customary for them to keep their distance as those with leprosy were among those deemed, "*unclean*." If you were considered unclean, you were exiled from your home, your family, the whole community. Social distancing to the ultimate and painful extreme. Levitical law prescribed this reality. "*Don't bring your issues and diseases to the rest of us!*" sort of idea. While the distance was not always defined, at least one authority laid it down that the unclean person was responsible for knowing the direction of the wind. If a healthy person was downwind from one considered unclean, the person with leprosy, in this case, would have to stand at least fifty yards away. Nothing could better show the utter isolation in which the "*unclean*" had to live.²

So here are ten who are with an unclean condition, tasked to be meteorologists in order to determine where they could exist, or not, at any given moment in relation to

² Exegetical support found in William Barclay's "Commentary on the Book of Luke." Westminster Press. 1975.

the community. Presumably most of the ten are Jewish, though we know at least one is said to be a foreigner, a Samaritan. We know that the Jews and Samaritans avoided each other at all costs. They funded negative campaign ads against each other that were plastered all over television and social media. “*That Samaritan hid the last Nutter Butter in the house so his kids couldn’t find it, and he could eat it later. If he’ll steal from his own children, can you imagine what he’ll steal from the rest of us?*” The comebacks were just the same, “*He’s a left-handed guitar player with two first names – is that really the kind of guy we want making decisions about insurance in our county?*”

You get the point. They didn’t get along. *At all.* Yet in this band of ten, there was at least one Samaritan. A common misfortune had broken down the racial and national barriers. In the common suffering of their leprosy, they had forgotten they were Jews and Samaritans and remembered only they were humans who were more alike than not. Surely one of the things that should draw all humanity together in any time but certainly during this pandemic is a common need of God... whose very nature is love itself. But, we are often too consumed with our own issues, needs, desires to stop long enough to see that someone else is more like us than not.

I sat in my car one day this week, pulling over near a park to jump on a ZOOM Meeting starting in a few minutes. I had just learned of the death a close friend had experienced due to COVID-19, and I just sorta sat there in silence for a bit. Looking ahead of me at the open ball field there was a family of five and their kids running after balls and laughing and playing. There was another couple on a walk and another family yet playing with their dog. I just sat there silently and took in the sight. I finally broke the silence of the moment saying simply, “*And the world plays on.*” You never know, as you move about your daily agenda, whose life has come to a screeching halt. It never hurts to put ourselves in the shoes of another from time to time. But for these ten? Not many giving them the time of day. Every day was a dead end... a screeching halt of a life. *Enter Jesus.*

The ten holler at him, heaving a Hail Mary of “*have mercy on us*” from the 50-yard line toward Jesus in hopes that the pass may somehow, miraculously, be completed. It’s never worked to this point. But... Jesus “*saw them.*” Those three words may be sermon enough for today. Jesus *saw them.* Who do you need to see? Jesus saw them and with compassion says, “*Go show yourselves to the priests.*” May seem like an odd thing to say to you and me but in that time, if a person with leprosy was fortunate enough to experience healing, that person was required to show him/herself to a priest. Only a priest could certify that a person was truly clean and therefore able to leave quarantine and return to the community.

The ten take off for the temple, but along the way, they are healed. Presumably they all realize this at some point, but only one of the ten has the thought pop into his soul – “*I’m going back to Jesus!*” The other nine continue the beeline to the priest. After all,

that was the instruction they were given anyway. Just following orders. And... they couldn't see their families or go to Applebee's until the priest cleared them to re-enter society as a clean human being.

If you had found freedom after being shunned for years, what would you do? There was *one* who went back. Jesus is clear to say it is the Samaritan (*you may read that as the Republican or Democrat or Immigrant or Jayhawk... whoever is not in your camp*). That's the point of the distinction. The person you disagree with, and maybe even despise, is the one who does the right thing. Jesus does this time and time again when he teaches. It is the Samaritan who goes back and throws himself at the feet of Jesus... the first person other than the other nine that he has been face to face with for who knows how long.

Gratitude just poured out of this man. The word may more accurately be worship. Jesus says, "*Weren't there ten of you? Where are your friends? Could they not sacrifice a few more minutes to give glory to God? No? Only you... the one least expected to do so.*" And the key to the whole thing Jesus says next, "*Get up. On your way. Your faith has made you well.*" Ten were healed. Only one was deemed well. What does that say to us? Wellness is a matter of faith. Being made well is a matter of the heart. Gratitude seems to be the key... and not a flippant '*thank you*' but a spiritual discipline... a life led by gratitude. As the rock band Boston famously sang, "*It's more than a feeling.*"

Researchers have noted that positive emotions wear off quickly. Dr. Emmons suggests that our emotional systems like newness. They like novelty. They like change. We adapt to positive life circumstances so that before too long, the new car, the new relationship, the new house doesn't feel so new and exciting anymore. Gratitude, however, makes us appreciate the value of something. Valuing something presses beyond emotion and allows us to extract more benefits from it without us taking it for granted. Gratitude propels us to participate more fully in our lives. We become more present to the small things, the moments of grace and beauty that we may have previously overlooked. We become participants in the world, not simply spectators. According to research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, this improved living, a state of wellness, is true whether you are a healthy college student or an older person with an incurable disease. The study went down like this...

College students were asked to fill out a weekly report of five things for which they were grateful. They listed things like "*the generosity of friends*" and "*the Rolling Stones*." Another group, made up of adults with incurable diseases, were asked to write down a list of things that made them thankful. At the same time, comparable groups were asked to count their hassles and frustrations instead. They listed aggravations such as "*hard to find parking*" and "*finances depleting quickly*." Instead of

focusing on how rich they were in various aspects of their lives, members of these groups focused on their poverty.

You already know the results. In the end, the grateful groups felt better about their lives and more optimistic about the future. The thankful college students exercised more, and the chronically ill adults who focused on blessings reported sleeping longer and waking up refreshed. The members of the grateful groups were also nicer to neighbors and more willing to help people with personal problems, leading the researchers to conclude that gratitude can serve as a *“moral motivator.”*³ *“Your faith has made you well,”* says Jesus to returning Samaritan. Jesus gives him an elbow bump... not so much for the faith that *asked* for healing, but for the faith that *returned* to give thanks. It’s a *grateful* faith, not a *gimme* faith that saves us... that makes us well.

Eugene Peterson said, *“There is a great market for religious experience [or healing] in our world. There is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”*

Gratitude, not practiced as a discipline, puts us at risk of a life drowning in selfishness. We have to *choose* gratitude until we are grateful. It’s a discipline. You write it down. You say it. You think it. You feel it. You breathe it. Eventually, gratitude becomes the very lens through which you see the world.



I was convicted the other day seeing this image of Staff Sergeant Johnny Jones with his quote that reads, *“People ask how I stay so positive after losing my legs. I simply ask how they stay so negative with theirs.”*⁴ I’m not one who is into comparisons because that just sets us up as competitors – *“My sickness is worse than yours. My life is harder than yours. My bank account is not okay*

³ Brown, David. “Counting blessings is healthful.” The Washington Post, March 10, 2003, A11.

⁴ I saw this quote and picture on a Facebook post of a friend some time ago. I do not know the original source.

*until it has more in it than yours.” Comparative living is not generally helpful. But when I experience positive people... who may not be *healed* but are *well*... I am inspired to practice gratitude more intentionally. So often, however, when we get what we want, we never come back. How often have we been the *nine*, instead of the *one* who comes back to praise God?*



Bishop Michael Curry, most known for the sermon he gave at Harry and Meghan’s Royal Wedding a couple of summers ago was interviewed about his latest book entitled, “*The Power of Love*” which also just happens to be, arguably, the title of one the best songs from 1985, “*The Power of Love*” by Huey Lewis and the News. *Back to the Future* soundtrack. “*The Power of love is a curious thing...*” If I got

that song stuck in your head, you’re welcome. Enjoy! But I digress. Bishop Curry was first asked about how we sort through the emotions of crises. Curry noted that “*When it hurts, it hurts, and we need to own that.*”

Have you had a good pandemic cry yet? I spoke to one of our beloved members this week who is in her 80s. She said, “*I’ve never seen anything like this. Closest to it was the polio scare when I was a kid. **Only** time I ever saw my dad cry,*” she said. Her brother was hospitalized, and her dad was just sure he had polio. Fortunately, he did not. But her father’s tears made a lasting impact. Only time. Maybe you need a good cry and I would encourage it. Such can be cathartic. Bishop Curry said, “*We do this together. We have to exist in the rituals of faith which were beta tested a long time ago. Those disciplines hold us in the difficult seasons while God’s energy finds a way to be reinfused into the community.*”

And then Bishop Curry spoke about wellness and gratitude saying, “*Love is the only thing that will work. If you look at love only sentimentally, it may not work. But love, as Jesus demonstrates, seeks the wellness of others, even sometimes above my own need. That kind of self-less living is the only thing that has ever changed anything for the good. Think about it yourselves,*” he continued. “*Who are the people that actually made a difference in your life? They actually made a difference in your life not because they were doing something for themselves, but because they actually cared about you. Think about any kind of social change that has ever happened in human history. It has been people who have been thinking more about others than themselves. Consider first responders – they don’t know who they’re going in to help. They do it because it’s selfless. Truth is, no good created and done by human beings has ever been done from the motivation of selfishness. It has always been selfless service and giving... which is what love actually is.*”⁵

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2kj-uvtN8>



You may have seen the picture of the mystery man standing outside of the Morristown Medical Center in New Jersey. He's holding this homemade, cardboard sign that reads: *"Thank you all in emergency for saving my wife's life. I love you all."* He returned to give

thanks and with tears in his eyes, he held this sign. Karen Zatorski, Senior Public Relations Manager at the Medical Center, said, *"We don't know who the man is, we don't know who his wife is. The nurses happened to be there and took his picture. What's beautiful is that's all we know."* His gratitude inspired others as the social media post of this unknown, grateful man, was shared some 70,000 times and inspired a GoFundMe Fundraiser to meet the Centers need for protective gear for their staff, raising the \$12,000 needed at the time. Gratitude inspires generosity.⁶ Generosity changes the world.

Until we practice gratitude... allowing it to become a part of us... we will never be well in the way Jesus proclaims the grateful Samaritan to be. So today is ours... this moment at least, all we are promised. Will gratitude lead the way? Do you want to be well? Your life is an open mic. The mic is yours. What will you say?

⁶ <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/man-holds-cardboard-thank-you-sign-for-new-jersey-nurses/>