

“Ingratitude and the Heart of God”

Luke 17: 11-19

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Text: Luke 17:11-19 (NIV) ¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

I want to open this morning with a confession that may surprise all of you. It is this: I am a sinner! ☺☹ It is not that I sin at times therefore I am a sinner. Rather, I sin at times **because** I am a sinner. It is built into my nature. Sin. Falling short of God's requirements. It is deeply embedded in my spiritual and emotional DNA. And every now and then, I am able to see my sin nature come out big time. In fact, just when I begin to wonder if I have won the battle against my sin nature and begun to put it to death, the Lord allows me to see it in full. And it is really... humbling.

Last week, Pastor Winans had us put on those silly colored glasses making the point that we all see things thru our own perspective. Well done! I was thinking that is true. And because I am a sinner, I wonder if I could ever really see things thru God's perspective? If I could more and more see things from the view of Jesus... would it not be liberating and pleasing indeed to God? I think that all of this has a great deal to do with ingratitude and thanksgiving and the heart of God... and even with our well-known account of the ten lepers. But first, let us pray.

Perhaps it is just me, but I think we have several stores with tons of handicapped spaces. Usually half empty. We all know what it's like to drive around and around politely wondering why there are 37 empty handicapped places in front of the store. Wishing for a moment that we had a handicapped tag. Well, I must tell you... back on May 2, I had a partial knee surgery and the best thing about it was that doctor's office have me one off these. (Red handicapped car tag). Now...my surgery was only a partial knee replacement and I had the other knee done a few years ago so I was familiar with the rehab and all of that. So... I was up and around

and driving in ten days and I played golf in two weeks. So, I really did not need this thing. But... it was good for six months! It expired 11-08-17! What was I to do with it when I did not really need it after two weeks? What would you do? Well... you don't get too many breaks in life and... my knee still hurt a very little bit... so I left it on the dashboard of that little car. And I freely admit that... I kept parking in handicapped spaces. And then I noticed some people looking at me oddly... watching me wondering if I was really handicapped. I just pretended not to see them watching. But then... without thinking about it, a couple of times... as I was walking... I started... to limp... if they were looking. I mean... I did that. And I think I could see the Lord rolling his eyes. My sin nature was in full bloom and I felt irritated with myself. But I kept the red tag till the last day. In fact, it occurred to me that I could change the date to 2018! It was so convenient and self-serving and too good to be true and after all, **life is all about me...** and my convenience and the people at MacDonald's said I deserve a break today and every day. Really, I deserve a break.

I guess that behavior was a small thing on the sin scale. Especially in a world where every morning we read about another politician or movie star or teacher or clergy person who has actually been a sexual predator. When every other day we read about a shooting where ten or more innocent people are killed. We could fill our day observing sin at work in our world of moral anarchy... but God calls us first to observe and consider sin in our **own** lives. And sure... that use of the handicap tag was maybe a "two" level sin in the eyes of God. Not the worst sin. But even so... here is the question: **how does my sin nature and how do my sinful choices hurt the heart of God?** What things do I do as one wrestling with sin... what things do I do that hurt His heart? If I were to ask God what one thing is it that most hurts Him and disappoints Him... I do not think he would say "It's your taking advantage of the handicap tag" or "It's your occasional placement of your eyes in a lustful way!" Or "It's your spending more time immersed in the world instead of the Kingdom of God." Or "It's your proclivity to grumble and mumble when you should be praising me!" I think he would say "Richard, it is your ingratitude!" Sin is always present when God's heart is ignored by us sinners. God would say "Your real handicap is not your knee... it's your sin nature!"

And if God spoke to me that way, would I be surprised? Would I grasp that I am hearing from the maker of heaven and earth who is not only the eternal God who has existed from forever and who is sovereign over all things... but He is actually an emotional being with feelings and desires and heartaches... the one who took on flesh and stood at the tomb of Lazarus and cried even though he was about to raise him up and give him back his life on earth... why was he crying? Because he has feelings and it breaks his heart to see what sin has done to his creation... and yes, he will bring it all to an end at some point and we can't figure out what he is waiting for... but in the meantime, do we begin to grasp how much we who are redeemed

can hurt His heart with our ingratitude? Do we begin to grasp what our sinful ways look like to God and how that disappoints Him?

We spoke of Luther and the Reformation for two weeks. A very strange man Luther. Brilliant and committed to Christ and more than a little irascible and crazy at times. But his strength arguably lay not in his intellect or passion for the Gospel although it was substantial. First, his strength was rooted in his own understanding of just how undeserving of God's grace he was! And how incredibly deep did his sin nature go. In a letter to his friend Spalatin, Luther lamented that a new church group was forming, and they were calling themselves "Lutherans!" He was stunned. His heart was in the reformation of the church not in a new denomination especially not one named after himself. This was a shock and obnoxious to Luther and he said:

“What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine! Neither was I crucified for you! How then should I... a poor stinking maggot-fodder that I am... come to call the children of Christ by my wretched name?”

Luther knew himself and he knew that God loved him nonetheless. Now... I understand that someone may be thinking “Good grief this is a depressing sermon. Is this Pastor saying we are all worthless clumps of dirt with no value? Are we all just ‘maggot-fodder?’” Not at all. That is the irony of the Gospel... that even though I sin without trying and I miss the mark of God and I fail to praise and please Him... and I downright ignore Him, He loves me and you and sees eternal value in us! But is our greatest sin ingratitude or at least inadequate gratitude? Do we realize that God loves us despite our being hard to love and despite our sin?

Many years ago, Donna and I took our little guys on a camping trip. They were, of course, very young. It was our one and only family camping trip. And it was a nightmare. Somehow, despite my best efforts, I parked that little drab camper on an angle. Donna spent two hours trying to make blueberry pancakes on a single burner five inches across while the batter ran onto the floor and the kids nearly starved to death. Then I cut my hand on the hitch. And the Christians around us were totally indifferent to relaxation. They had “Jogging for Jesus” at six am and “Psalms at Seven” and things like that. It was exhausting. We sold the camper.

One night we took the kids into the town of Corinth in upstate New York. I just wanted to say I had been to Corinth. We got some pizzas and cokes and ice cream, and we went to the local park and spread out a picnic blanket and it was nice... for about ten minutes. Then, as we sat there, we spotted a bum... a real hobo across the ball field digging in a garbage can. He had an old bicycle and a long beard and terrible loose-fitting clothing. A genuine hobo. I was

thinking about him and watching him when our son Chris said, “Dad let’s go over and ask that guy if he’d like to eat with us ok?” And I said “Oh yeah. That’s just what I was thinking Chris.” So, we did.

The man was uneasy and surprised, but he smiled slightly and followed us back to the family. There he was on the edge of the blanket. Filthy. He smelled bad. Very bad. He made small talk with the boys. He hung his head. He ate some pizza and had a coke and he got up and he thanked us very sweetly and he called Donna “Mamm” ... and he walked slowly back to his old bicycle. And in man’s eyes... perhaps in my eyes... he was a worthless tramp and very dirty. But he was made in the image of God... an outcast to man but very valuable to God. And I thought that is how I must look in my sinful state to God who is perfectly Holy... dirty and unkempt and smelling of sin and yet He invites me to sit with him and eat with him and do I say, “Thank you?” I prayed for the bum... and even more so... for myself.

This pulpit has said this before. If God had a choice between the worst bum out there and the Grand Canyon, God would choose the bum. David wrote:

Psalm 103:10-14 (NIV) ¹⁰ He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

I say, “Lord I’m handicapped by sin.” He says, “Yeah I know.” I say, “Thank you for your kindness and grace towards me” and He says, “Thank you for saying thank you.” And every time I disappoint Him I learn a little more... about His heart and how my ingratitude hurts His heart.

Remember that scene from **“A Man for all Seasons”** where Matthew, the head of Sir Thomas’s household, is resigning? Matthew has been a cheat and a deceiver, but Sir Thomas has been good to him. As Matthew is about to leave Thomas More says to him: “I will miss you Matthew.” And Matthew says, “Oh come sir... I know you see right thru me” ... which was true. He did see right thru him. And Sir Thomas says “I will miss you Mathew.” This was a matter of the heart, and God has a deeply sensitive heart. He sees right thru us but He still loves us. And we should be thankful.

Possibly the most moving verse in the Old Testament is found in the Prophet Jeremiah. Six hundred years before the Lord Jesus Christ was born Jeremiah was called by God to prosecute

Israel for their idolatry. The whole thing made Jeremiah sick and he was called “The Weeping Prophet.” But God placed it upon Jeremiah’s heart to tell the people of God’s pain. God spoke to Israel thru him and we read:

Jeremiah 3:19 (NIV) ¹⁹ "I myself said, "How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.' I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me."

Can we hear the pain in that statement? They never gave thanks. They hurt the heart of God with their ingratitude and unfaithfulness. Their sin natures ran wild with indifference towards God with their handicapped signs on their carts while they cheated their neighbors and even cheated God. They were great at calling on God but not at praising God. Like the nine lepers. You may think that all this talk of the depth of our sin natures has nothing to do with our text today... but it does. Because the actions of the nine were a perfect illustration of how our sin natures yield thanklessness. Those nine were men with **INABILITY** to help themselves and **INGRATITUDE** to God and **INFIDELITY** against God. **FLOUNDERING FOOLISH AND FAITHLESS!** Let’s consider our text from Luke Seventeen.

Luke 17:11 (NIV) Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

Jesus was walking along that narrow strip separating two communities that had no use for each other. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be low-lives and the Samaritans considered the Jews to be uppity and arrogant. But we are about to see how a common bond of misery can bring people together who would never otherwise go near each other. Leprosy. They are contagious possibly, and they are unclean, and they don’t need handicap signs because they are dressed in black and their faces are covered, and they are supposed to yell “Unclean” if anyone might come near them... and they are unwelcome in the town. They are outsiders and all they have is each other.

¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

They see Jesus. They may have heard about Jesus. Instead of shouting “Unclean” they shout “Master! Have pity on us!” A word that did not just mean “Look at us in our dreadful state” but “Do something for us Jesus!” (Ele-eho) and they are loud, and they call Jesus “Master!” A word that can mean “Commander.” As if they are saying “Jesus! Command our flesh to be healed! Just give the order! You can do this!” These unclean men may have far greater faith than many of the disciples because they know who Jesus is! That was always the question: Jesus asked “Do you know who I am?” When Jesus asked Peter who people were saying that he was... Peter said John the Baptist risen from the dead or maybe one of the Prophets, but

Jesus looked at Peter and all of them and said “Yes... but who do **YOU** say that I am?” If you’re here this morning and you have never wrestled with that question you need to drop everything today and do so because eternity depends upon how you answer it and how I answer it. Peter said “I know who you are! You are the Christ!” But it is fascinating that the lepers knew who he was. Someone will say “No, Pastor you are making too much out of their polite use of the word “Master” but again...it was also used to mean Commander and they believe Jesus could command their flesh to become clean. And Jesus does so with one requirement. We read:

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

Jesus had been regularly accused of disregarding the laws and trivializing the Priests, but it was not so. Jesus respected the laws of Moses and he knew the Priests played an important part in Israel. In this case, they had to certify that a leper or someone else who was unclean was now clean and could enter the community. Watch the movie **Brooklyn** and you’ll see a great scene in which the immigrants are standing on line at Ellis Island in 1920 hoping for admission to the United States. And each one had to go before an officer who checked their paperwork and could ask about their health and if they had a sponsor... and that officer could say “No!” and keep them out. The priests in ancient Israel were those officers and each leper had to stand before one of them who would scrutinize everything about them.

Notice Jesus did not immediately heal them. Their healing took place literally as they were going. When they obeyed Christ, they were healed. One of them came back. Perhaps after he was cleared by the Priest or maybe in his excitement before he presented himself to the priest, but he came back! We read:

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

Remember the earlier word? They cried out in a loud voice? Now this man cries out in the same loud voice. The word is “mega” ... he is so loud in praising God that it’s as if he has a megaphone! And he makes me wonder why I am so much better at crying out loudly to God when I am in need than I am at crying out loudly with thanksgiving and praise! The other nine used their mega voices to plead for help but not give God thanks! And with everything that happened, God who is long suffering, hurts in His own heart. Watch the man worship...

¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan.

He was unclean and unwanted and unloved. But he was deep enough spiritually to thank Jesus who now claims his Divine status by saying that the man who has thanked him... has actually thanked God. And now Jesus asks those around him who probably think this

Samaritan is beneath them... Jesus asks a question but he is making a statement to them with these words:

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Jesus says to his disciples that this foreigner knows him better than many of his own and "he thanks me as I should be thanked!" Then Jesus commends the man for his faith. And the heart of God was gratified by one out of ten who realized that his real problem was not his outward skin... but his inward sin nature.

This thanksgiving week... we do well to ask... "Am I a person who shouts loudly to God when I am in need but never shouts thanks to God when I am blessed? Or am I like Pastor Alberta riding around with his handicap sticker using it unjustly because life is all about myself? Do I come to God with my inability but fall into ingratitude and infidelity a moment later?" Is a prayer of repentance in order and a song of thankfulness appropriate lest we hurt the heart of God?

Let us pray.