

Title: "One Came Back"

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Gert Behanna was fifty-three years old when she discovered God. The shock and wonder of that discovery has never left her. Gert, however, had another kind of shock on the Sunday when she first went to church. She says, "I'd never been to church in my life and I remember how eagerly I awaited that first Sunday. I'd just had a glimpse of God Almighty – me, an alcoholic, a drug addict, lonely and miserable – already I was beginning to know what joy really was." Gert was a new Christian. She was eager to attend church to meet and talk with persons who had known the love of God for many years. "What ecstatic people these long-time Christians will be!" she thought. Even though becoming a Christian was probably the happiest day of her life, she was somewhat hesitant about going to church that first Sunday. "I was afraid they would embarrass me with their love and enthusiasm," she said.

Gert did not find the church people as loving and enthusiastic as she thought. What she discovered was "bowed heads, long faces and funeral whispers." She expected people to shower her with love and affection for making the right choice and wanting to be part of the church. No one welcomed her. No one spoke to her the first Sunday she went to church.

"As time went on and I attended other churches in various parts of the country," Gert writes, "I made a bewildering discovery. These long-faced, listless people were present in every congregation." Then she asked a very good question: "How come they come into God's presence Sunday after Sunday without breathing in the joy that dances in the very air?"

Jesus was traveling near the border between Samaria and Galilee. He was on his way to Jerusalem. Near the border was a group of lepers. It was a common sight to see such groups banded together on the outskirts of cities. No one wanted lepers around. They were often deserted by family and friends.

They saw Jesus and his disciples approaching. They knew who Jesus was. When they saw him their hopes were raised. They cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Jesus heard their cry. Having compassion on them he replied, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." It was customary for persons with leprosy or any other skin disorder to show themselves to the priests. It was the priests' duty to decide whether or not the person was healed or not. If the priests declared the leper cured, they were free to rejoin family and friends. They no longer had to live on the outskirts of town. They were accepted as whole persons. Thus Jesus told them to visit the priests.

The ten lepers did exactly what Jesus asked them to do. They went to show themselves to the priests. "And as they went," writes Luke, "they were made clean." They received the gift of healing. They were free to rejoin their families and friends. Thank God—free at last.....free from their dread disease.

Ten were healed; only one returned to say thanks. He wanted to find Jesus immediately. He was elated. He began praising God in a loud voice. He was healed. Such a healing could only have come from God. When he caught up with Jesus, he fell at his feet and thanked him.

And this brings me to the first thing I want to note this morning. **In saying thank you we often receive more than we expect.** Returning to Jesus to say thank you, this man received something he never expected. Jesus saw faith in the man at his feet. Jesus looked right at him and said, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” This man received more than just physical healing. He also received the gift of grace. Another translation has Jesus respond with these words: “Get up and be on your way; your faith has brought you salvation.” When we say thank you, we often receive a greater blessing for our effort.

A man named John Canuso made a deal with God. His nine-year-old daughter, Babe, had just been diagnosed with leukemia, and as he knelt at her bed, he swore, “You save my little girl; I’ll dedicate my life.” God did indeed save his little girl. Babe is now married and the mother of a little boy, a child she thought she would never have after all the chemotherapy and radiation.

John kept his promise. John was a builder by trade. In 1974, the year his daughter became ill, he reached into his own pocket to renovate and furnish a rundown Camden/Philadelphia home that became the first Ronald McDonald House, a place where families could stay while their youngsters were being treated at Children’s Hospital. John said, “Thank you, Lord. I’m glad you asked me to do something in my profession.” Helping others was John’s way of saying “thank you.”

Soon afterward he started his own foundation and raffled off houses and hosted art auctions and dinners. In just five years, with the help of his family and fellow builders, he raised over \$1,000,000 for leukemia research. In all the years since his daughter’s illness and treatment, John discovered more blessing than he ever expected. John continued to receive letters thanking him for all he had done from parents of ill children, from relatives of the children and from the doctors and staff of Children’s Hospital.

Only one out of ten came back to thank Jesus for the gift of healing. When he thanked Jesus, he received more than he expected. His faith came alive and he was a different person from that moment on.

And this is our second observation this morning. **In saying thank you we also bless others.** A Sunday School class of seven-year-olds in Huntington Beach, California, made cards to distribute to residents at a nearby nursing home. The children went from room to room handing persons their cards. Some people appreciated the cards while others said nothing.

Audrey Evangelista had one card left. She smiled as she handed it to a woman sitting in a wheelchair. The woman’s eyes filled with tears of joy. She exclaimed, “Oh, thank you!” Turning to another resident, this woman said, “Would you look at this! Isn’t it beautiful? Oh, thank you!” she said again to the seven-year-old. Audrey learned an important lesson that day. “I felt how good it was to give a person something,” she reflected later and always remembered it. That is a good feeling, isn’t it? Even Jesus appreciated being thanked, I’m sure.

That is why no prayer is complete without a word of thanksgiving. The Apostle Paul writes in 1Thessalonians in Chapter 5 – “Give thanks in all circumstances....” When you are going through a particularly difficult time, you might say, “No one knows what I’m going through. There is no way I could give thanks right now.” Give thanks anyway. You can’t know whether some of your burdens may someday be blessings.

CBS news anchor Dan Rather in his book *I Remember* tells about his football tryouts at Sam Houston State Teachers College. Rather had a love for football so he tried out for the team

hoping to receive a scholarship. The coach, T.F. “Puny” Wilson, was six feet seven inches and former All-American.

Rather writes, “The day was at hand when I suspected that my trial time was up. I was supposedly playing end, and one afternoon Puny had the opposition run one power sweep after another in my direction. This meant that the ball was given to one of their players and all the rest were supposed to knock me out of the way. I was convinced that my staying in school depended on my passing this test.”

That day things did not go well for young Dan Rather. He wrote, “They were knocking me past the cinder track. And pretty soon I landed over the fence and then in the next county.” When the ordeal was all over, Coach Puny put his arm around Rather and issued his verdict.

“Son,” he said, “I watched you out there the whole time today. And I want to tell you something I hope will stay with you the rest of your life, because if it does, it’ll be of no small value to you. You’re little.” The coach paused for a moment than added one more thing, “And you’re yellow!” Not a very good day for a young man who hoped to receive a football scholarship as a means of acquiring a college education.

Rather looks back and sees this as an influential moment in his life. “That was a defining moment,” he writes. “I was little by football standards, no doubt about it. I measured six feet and always said that I weighed 167 pounds, which was an outrageous lie. I weighed 155, a fly among elephants.

“By cutting off my so-called scholarship, Coach Puny had crushed a dream; eliminated my chance at housing in the athletic dorm; and I might have been driven out of college all together. As it turned out, however, the coach had done me an immeasurable service. To stay in school, I latched onto an apprentice sportscaster’s spot at a little radio station, and my obsession with football abated sufficiently so I could shift my attentions to where they would do me the most good for the long run – my journalism courses.”

Things aren’t going well for you? Give thanks anyway. By giving thanks we unlock the storehouse of God. Our trials are often transformed into triumphs.

But one more thing needs to be said. **We are all debtors.** Gert Behanna found long-faced Christians in the churches she visited. They were Christians who have forgotten the debt they owe. Every one of us ought to spend our lives saying, “Thank you, Lord, thank you, thank you.”

One came back praising God. Where are we this morning? Are we on the road with the nine healed lepers who take life and its many blessings for granted? Or is there a song in our hearts this morning – a song of thanksgiving for all God has done for us?