

## Returning Thanks

October 10, 2010 Ord 28C

### **Scriptures: 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15 and Luke 17:11-19**

---

<sup>11</sup>On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup>As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup>they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" <sup>14</sup>When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup>Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup>He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup>Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" <sup>18</sup>Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup>Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

### **Proclamation of the Word**

---

Have you ever noticed how some people begin the blessing over a meal.

Some lead by saying, "Bow your heads."

Others say, "May we pray."

Some begin by saying, "Let us return thanks."

Return thanks??

Did God lose it? And we need to return it? It is an odd saying.

Today's passages are both about two men who return thanks.

"Return" means give back something that rightfully belongs to someone else.

And both Naaman and the leprous Samaritan return thanks to God for a miraculous healing.

Returning thanks is not just an act of etiquette.

For these two men, it means joyful, lavish thanksgiving and worship.

Naaman is the important Syrian military leader with a skin affliction. He does not follow the God of Elisha, but hears through a slave girl of the prophet whose God can heal him. He ends up healed and gives praise to the God of Israel and offers a gift of thanks for this act of healing.

The unnamed Samaritan is unimportant, in contrast to Naaman, the military leader.

The Samaritan is relegated to the margins. He is cut off from any relationships.

He is banished by the priests for the protection and health of the community.

Basically, he is left to fend for himself...left for dead, ultimately.

Both Naaman and the Samaritan are afflicted with a skin disease.

Both are foreigners. And God Almighty heals both men.

Both return to thank the men who heal him and praise God.

Naaman makes a gift to present to Elisha and professes faith in the God of Israel.

The Samaritan falls on his knees in thanksgiving and praise.

He is the one of all 10 who were healed who returns to thank Jesus. Like the 10<sup>th</sup> coin and the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep. 10 and 100 are numbers which mean completeness in the Bible.

The faithful are incomplete without the lost one being restored.

The marginalized Samaritan recognizes that something bigger has happened.

Sure his health is restored.

But the Samaritan does something the others don't.  
He SEES, really sees what has happened.

The others dutiful return to the priests, their homes, and their restored health.

But the Samaritan SEES and it makes all the difference.

He sees that God Spirit is present in this rabbi.

He sees that he has received mercy and can't help himself.

He breaks into unrestrained, down on his knees thanksgiving to Jesus.

Where most people would see a double enemy, an outcast of the highest degree,  
Jesus sees a man in need of mercy.

Where most people would see a label: Samaritan, leper, unclean,  
Jesus sees a child of God.

What we see changes everything.

The Samaritan recognizes that he has encountered the Holy One in Jesus.

He returns and the young rabbi says, well, well, look who we have here.

Jesus says to the despised, enemy, the dirty outsider,  
"your faith has made you well."

The famous theologian Martin Luther, when asked what the heart of true worship is, responded, "the Tenth leper turning back."

Worship is returning thanks and having our sight restored-  
recognizing God in our midst.

What we see changes everything.

The other nine missed it!

They could not see.

How unfortunate to have encountered the living God and walk away with only your health.

But the Thankful Samaritan gained salvation, faith, and a relationship with the living God  
through Jesus Christ. And it starts with seeing and recognizing God.

We will sing "Now Thank We All Our God" as our closing hymn.

The person wrote it during a time in which you would think there would be nothing  
for which to be thankful.

It was written by a Lutheran pastor, Martin Rinkart, in the early 1600s,  
during the horrible 30 years war in Germany.

In addition to the battles, people were also dying from a lack of food and a terrible  
plague.

In one year it is estimated that around 4,000 people died in Rinkart's parish, and he performed  
all the funerals, including one for his wife.

In this time of deep darkness, he was able to write the words,

**"Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices, who wondrous things has  
done, in whom this world rejoices.... So keep us in his grace and guide us when  
perplexed, and free us from all ills, in this world and the next."**

In trials and in times of questioning,

in times of fear and times of doubt, when we feel most distant from God  
or when we are keeping our distance from Jesus, God will come to us.

God offers us faithfulness, healing, and give us something for which to be grateful—a reason to say,  
"Thank you."

Paul says, "Remember Jesus Christ was raised from the dead—that is my gospel."

Only faith in such good news, the gospel, could carry someone like Martin Rinkart to sing such words of praise after what he had suffered.

(Shared from Blake E. Rohrer, Midvale Community Lutheran Church, Madison, WI unrestrained  
<http://www.goodpreacher.com/backissuesread.php?file=3259>)

So what do you see?

So when faced with adversity- do you see danger or opportunity?

When asked to address a need- do you see a demand or a gift?

Do you see God as a stern, punitive judge or as a fair and loving parent?

When you meet a stranger- do you see potential enemy or a potential friend?

When looking at the future- do you see uncertainty or open doors?

What you see makes all the difference.

Last Saturday, a saint of the church, a man of great faith died. He died of a brain tumor. This singing saint's uniform was not a choir robe. He wore a pair of jeans, a tie-dyed bandana on his head, and a guitar in his hands. There is already a Facebook campaign to wear tie dye on the day of his memorial service for those who cannot attend the service.

David Bailey grew up in Beirut, Lebanon, the son of Presbyterian missionaries.

His father is the respected New Testament scholar, Dr. Kenneth Bailey.

Their last 10 years in Lebanon was during the civil war.

His family evacuated to Switzerland. David finished high school in Germany.

He graduated from Grove City College, PA and went to work for the US government monitoring satellites.

David Bailey quit his job as a software developer for corporate America 14 years ago after being diagnosed with an inoperable baseball-sized brain tumor.

David was 30. He had a wife and two young children.

He was given two years at most to live.

He made a decision to make the most of each day seeing each one as a gift from God.

He started writing and performing music.

He has touched many lives including mine.

His music with themes of faith, hope, love in the face of fear and death are far from Pollyanna optimism.

They are the songs of deepest and most profound faith, born out of looking death in the eye and seeing past it to the mercy and grace of God.

David affected the lives of many young people through his concerts at Montreat Youth and collegiate conferences.

Online Testimony about David's life has been abundant this week.

One teenager, ready to give up on faith and life, heard his music and was saved, literally.

I met David a few years ago in Montreat.

His music carried me through the terminal cancer of my sister in law, Crystal.

I shared the David's CDs with Crystal who placed her life and loved ones in God's hands even as she lost her battle with estrogen fed breast cancer.

Listen to David's words as remembered in an obituary this week:

*"For me, death has sort of become like a friend who walks beside me but is annoying enough that I keep him at a solid arm's length.(he told blogger Michael Manning in a 2007 interview.)*

*Cancer saved my life. It showed me how precious the gift of time is.*

*It forced me to overcome some fears and pursue a passion.*

*It drove me to want to make a real difference in the world and in other people's lives by sharing hope and to leave a legacy for my children more resounding than a few mementos and a 401(k)."*

(Obituary: David Bailey / Illness made him follow his gift for music, Feb. 26, 1966 - Oct. 2, 2010

Thursday, October 07, 2010. By Ann Rodgers, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

David brought hope and the light of God's love into the lives of so many.

Cancer saved his life, he says. It taught him how precious the gift of time is.

He encouraged us to make the most of each day, hour, moment, second.

He had the eyes of faith.

He had the heart of a thankful believer who knew that love is stronger than death and that life is eternal.

Every moment seen as one thing- a GIFT from God.

David went back to work after three years.

He served his church as the Elder responsible for the Evangelism ministry.

He was a steward not only because he gave, but because he saw God's hand touching him and those around him.

He was a caretaker of God's gifts: his family, his talent, his ministry...

he spent his days rejoicing and comforted in God's presence in his life.

Faith sustained him and made him well.

He could have run the other way toward desperation.

He could have hung his head or been angry.

I am sure he felt that way, but he did not stay there.

But his last years were a constant returning to the Lord who brought him hope, love, and an appreciation for every moment.

His music was his thank offering.

His music was a gift to be shared.

It was through music that he experienced healing even though his cancer was never cured.

David M. Bailey knew how to return thanks.

Thousands of lives have been touched by his witness and faith including my own.

And for that I am truly blessed and grateful.

Thanks be to God who is faithful and who can be trusted in this life and the life to come!

Rev. Laura Smith Conrad  
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church