**Luke 17: 11-19**[11] Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled 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."

The focus of the message here is how those who are healed by Jesus respond, and to a certain extent, the resulting emotion. This beautifully fashioned story of the leper who returned to give thanks.

At the time I am discussing now, Jesus passed through a border; a kind of no-man’s land that defines the geographic space between Samaria and Galilee. There he is approached by lepers who due to their skin disease, have been deemed unfit to dwell in populated areas. Knowing their unfortunate place in society and recognising the power of the one who was passing near them, they called out to Jesus, but carefully from a distance as was expected of lepers, in a desperate effort to be freed of their circumstances.

Jesus stopped and looked at them, and then commanded them to show themselves to the priests. The actual miracle of the healing took place as they walked away from him.

One of them, who saw that he was healed, turned back praising God with a loud voice. This gratitude met with Jesus’ approval, and he asked what happened to the other nine who did not return. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?

Now, one could argue that the other nine did as they were commanded: they went to show themselves to the priests. So, what was different about this one man? He was a Samaritan! One of the adversaries of Israel. The other nine were Jewish. We’ll come back to that in a minute.

Firstly, let’s look at how the disease affected the nine Jewish people.

The priests in those days were the equivalent of the modern-day health inspector. If you had any form of skin disease, it was evaluated and if it was found to be leprosy, you were banished from normal life, in that the only people you could then associate with were other lepers. It was terrible, they couldn’t associate with their loved ones, or others in the synagogue. they were now alien. They could only associate with others suffering the same horrific misery. Hence, those afflicted with leprosy suffered more than just the dermatological ailment. They were quarantined and unable to enter the temple.

Well interestingly, it’s only in very recent times that it has been realised and accepted by the medical profession that leprosy is nowhere near as contagious as was thought in the time of Jesus.

Anyway, if these unfortunate people were cured, their first step would be to go to the priests for re-examination, and if found to be cured then the person could undertake the necessary rituals to become ritually clean again.

Consequently, when Jesus commanded the ten lepers to show themselves to the priests, he was telling them to begin the process that would allow them to regain their full status within the worship and life of the Jewish community. The text tells us that only one saw that he was healed. I expect that in the excitement, the others couldn’t wait to get to the priests, as they had been instructed. But there is another point to consider here. The other nine had more to gain from continuing their journey to the priests, a vital step in the process toward becoming ritually clean. The fact that these nine lepers left to follow these instructions before their healing took place, showed the confidence that they had in Jesus.

However, the Samaritan had no such incentive. The Samaritans were the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Despite all the modern-day problems in Israel, a group of Samaritans still exist to this day. The Samaritans regard themselves as the true Israel, which as you can imagine, causes some friction with some of the inhabitants of modern-day Israel. The area of Samaria is nowadays simply referred to as part of the West Bank.

There is today, and historically, there has always been a constant rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans which goes back so far that the reason for it seems obscure. Early references contain a vivid number of comments as to the Samaritans impurity.

This story is an example of the great law of life and survival. Traditionally, the Jews hated the Samaritans, and the Samaritans were resigned to it. But here was a band of ten men who, in the common tragedy of their leprosy had set aside that they were Jews and Samaritans. They remembered only that they were men in need.

Interesting. There are documented tales of this type of survival in the animal kingdom, where a flood has surged through a piece of the country. The wild animals have naturally congregated on a higher piece of ground for safety and the animals have been found standing peacefully together; animals that would at any other time do their best to kill each other.

Coming forward a couple of milleniums,perhaps we can take a lesson from this. We are all in the same boat, i.e., this fragile planet Earth. Perhaps all nations, despite their different cultures and beliefs, could all make a stand together for the benefit of the planet, and the future of its inhabitants.

However, despite the comradeship of the Jewish lepers, the prospect of an inspection by the Jewish priests and the possibility of the consequent cleansing rituals held little promise for the Samaritan. Sadly, he was a foreigner, an outsider who would remain on the margin of society, even if he were cured of leprosy. The Samaritan’s status as an outsider allowed him to see his healing different from the other nine. Instead of seeing it as a step toward the improvement of his own circumstances, he saw it as a miracle from God, to which the only possible response was praise. Instead of going toward his own individual improved status, he turned back to Jesus in gratitude and thanksgiving.

Here was a person who was used to being an outcast and consequently overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness towards him. He was so emotional that he fell at Jesus’ feet in thanksgiving. I understand that this reading is quite popular in the United States of America during their annual Thanksgiving services, although not quite so popular with turkeys.

Some sermon writers interpret this passage as a story in the Gospels that apparently shows ingratitude. I’m not so sure. We don’t know what happened to the other nine, or whether they were ungrateful, as they were unlikely to meet Jesus again. My guess is that they were indeed extremely grateful.

Few of us have not at some time owed a great deal to a fellow person. We mustn’t forget to show our gratitude and thankfulness. Often it happens that a friend, doctor, surgeon etc., does something for us that is not possible to repay.   
  
For example, Gillian and I have experienced, both together and separately, the generosity of people overseas who go out of their way for us as their guests and visitors. While we remember their kindness with great fondness it is nevertheless impossible to repay those people, just as the nine Jews could not. Our solution is to show our gratitude and thanksgiving by being generous to other people in turn. In this way, our gratitude then goes around in a big circle, and subsequently, it is an excellent way we can show gratitude and thank God by trying to deserve his goodness and mercy a little better.

This text is much more than an illustration of writing thankyou notes. Gratitude can come in many expressions. Sometimes gratitude can be posthumous, such as the recent tributes to our dear late Queen Elizabeth. One of the most well documented and meaningful expressions of gratitude in our recent history is this one. “Never in the field of human conflict, was so much owed by so many, to so few”.

Yes, a healing occurs in this story, but something even greater occurs. The restoration of wellness that comes through the Samaritan’s relationship with God, expressed in thanksgiving and praise. His faith is expressed in his worship of God which has enabled him to find peace, health and well-being, gifts that can also be ours each day as we too give God thanks and praise.

Amen