

FROM MERCY TO GRATITUDE TO WHOLENESS

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Text: Luke 17:11-19

JESUS IS WALKING ALONG one day when he's approached by ten people, all suffering from leprosy. They cry out to him for mercy, but they're careful not to get too close. They're considered unclean, and they're actually required by law to keep their distance. But Jesus doesn't look at them the way other people do, with fear and judgment. He sees their need, and he responds to it. He tells them to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they're walking away, they're healed—all ten of them.

So, think about what's happening here. The condition these people have isn't just physical. There's a social dimension to it as well. They're forced to live in isolation. They're not allowed to be with their families, their friends, their neighbors, all because of their disease. So, when Jesus heals them, he's not just healing their bodies—he's restoring them to community. He's making it possible for them to be part of the human world again. And he's crossing a boundary to do it. He's breaking the rule that says those people belong over there, away from everyone else.

So that's the first thing we see in this story: mercy—mercy that crosses boundaries. Jesus doesn't stop to ask if these people are clean or unclean, touchable or untouchable. He simply cures them. That's what God's mercy is like—it's not cautious or calculating. It reaches out across every line that separates "us" from "them." Religious lines, political lines—whatever.

Maybe you've known that kind of mercy yourself: a time when you were alone, and someone showed you kindness; a time when you felt unworthy, and someone saw the real you. Those moments are powerful. They remind us that God's mercy always finds us, wherever we are.

SO ALL TEN OF these people receive this incredible gift of mercy. They're all healed, and at the same time they're all restored. Their lives are given back to them. But look at

what happens next. Nine of the ten run off without acknowledging what Jesus did for them, which seems kind of rude, but you can't really blame them. They've been alone for so long. I'm sure all they can think about is getting back to their families—the people they love.

But one of them is different. I'm sure he can't wait to get home either, but before he runs off, he turns back to Jesus, falls on the ground, and thanks him. Which is a little surprising to Jesus. "Wait a minute. I just healed ten people," he says. "And only one of them gives any praise to God? And he's not even a Jew, but a Samaritan, an outsider?"

So that's the second thing we see in this story: the need to respond to God's mercy with gratitude. Not that God demands it. Jesus doesn't get mad at the nine who ran off and doesn't revoke their healing. He simply notices something deeper happening in the one who returned.

Gratitude doesn't earn grace, but it does recognize it. It opens our eyes to the presence of God already at work in our lives. It's what turns a gift into a relationship. It's what transforms mercy received into love returned. Gratitude, when it's real, isn't just a polite "thank you." It's a turning of the heart. It's what happens when we pause long enough to realize how dependent we are on grace—that every breath, every friendship, every sunrise is a gift.

I remember a woman in a church I used to serve who lost her job. She was angry and scared, wondering what she was going to do. But instead of letting bitterness take root inside her, she spent her time writing thank-you notes—to people who'd been kind to her in the past, to God for small mercies, even to herself for having the strength to get out of bed every day. Eventually she did find a new job, and looking back on the whole experience, she told me later that gratitude hadn't fixed her situation. But it had changed how she thought about it. It had helped her to see that

she wasn't alone, and that realization had become a kind of healing all its own.

When we practice gratitude, we start to see that God's mercy isn't a one-time thing. It's the ongoing rhythm of our lives. Gratitude tunes our hearts to that rhythm—it keeps us awake to grace.

NOW HERE'S WHERE THE story takes an interesting turn. After the Samaritan thanks him, Jesus says, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Which is kind of odd because he's already been made well. He's already been healed. That is the whole reason why he's saying thank you. So, what does Jesus mean by that?

Well, the word he uses here is "sozo," which does mean "to be made well" in a physical sense. But it also has a larger meaning. It also means "to be made whole" in a deeper sense. So, when Jesus says "your faith has made you well," he's not talking about the physical healing that all ten have already received. He's talking about something the nine who didn't show any gratitude missed out on—a wholeness that goes beyond the body. All ten received mercy, but only the one who turned back discovered relationship. All ten were healed, but only the one who turned back was transformed.

So that's the third thing we see in this story: wholeness that's more than mere healing. Wholeness that happens when mercy and gratitude come together. When we receive God's mercy and respond with thanksgiving, something inside us begins to change. Our hearts expand. Our perspective widens. We find peace not just in our circumstances, but within ourselves.

THIS IS WHAT JESUS is showing us: mercy and gratitude together create something greater than either one alone. Mercy is God's gift; gratitude is our response. And in that exchange, we find the wholeness we were made for.

This is the rhythm of faith: mercy received, gratitude offered, wholeness found. And it's the same rhythm we follow in worship. We come as people in need of mercy. We confess. We hear the assurance of grace. We give thanks. And something happens inside us. Over time, we start to see our lives not as a list of failures and regrets, but as a landscape of grace. Our focus shifts from what's missing to what's already here.

We let go of our worry and fear and shame, and a space opens up for joy.

So, here's my invitation to you: as you move through the week ahead, notice the gifts you receive—a kind word, a moment of beauty—and take a moment to stop and give thanks. That's all. Nothing complicated. Just be grateful and let that rhythm seep into your life.

Let's pray together:

Gracious and merciful God, you meet us on the road, you hear our cries for mercy, and you give us more than we could ever deserve or imagine. Teach us to turn back in gratitude—to see your hand in the everyday gifts of life, to remember your goodness even when times are hard, and to live as people who've been made whole by your grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who makes us well in body, mind, and spirit. Amen.