

More than a Feeling:
Living in Gratefulness

Here we see the Samaritans once again out shining the Jews in matters of faith and practice. The Samaritan leper continues on from the last story in Luke where a Samaritan is the main character – the Good Samaritan – where just like this story, the wrong guy gets it right. In the Ancient Jewish world the Samaritans were people who were implicitly unclean by their mixed heritage. They were Jews of mixed blood which made the Samaritans unclean and impure by their very nature. In this narrative we have Jesus moving into specifically Samaritan territory – this signals to the reader that something interesting and scandalous is about to happen. The love of God is moving out into the world – to save and heal all – not just a few.

Jesus heals 9 Jewish Lepers and 1 Samaritan leper. The Samaritan is doubly unclean. Firstly by being a leper and secondly by being a Samaritan, the other lepers with him were only unclean from their leprosy. The 9 Jews could go to a priest and be pronounced clean of their leprosy, but the Samaritan could not be pronounced clean of his ethnicity. Only God made flesh could expose the disease of this separatism and prejudice and pronounce the Samaritan clean and that God is a God for all – who brings health and salvation. Remember the

word 'salvation' comes from the Greek word 'sozo' meaning 'health' or 'wellness'. Jesus gives us the fullness of life – through Jesus we are made well from our unhealthy and prejudice attitudes towards each other, ourselves and the world. Through Jesus we are saved from ourselves and made well again.

Now the writer of Luke, like the other Gospel writers was very clever and nuanced communicator. Remember what I said at the beginning of the sermon about the Samaritan characters in Luke's Gospels so we can unpack the depth of what is happening here.

What are the two great commandments?

To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. And who is my neighbour? Our enemies. Now who do we know of that is the exemplar of loving our enemies in the Gospel of Luke?

I will give you a hint...a rich man goes to Jesus.....but who is my neighbour. So Jesus told him a story...

The wrong guy gets it right!

In today's Gospel we have a Samaritan character going for the double whammy. This Samaritan finishes off the 2 great commandments by loving the Lord his God with all his heart mind and soul. He is grateful and recognises the work of

God in his life – while the others walk away. The Samaritan is thankful and grateful – the others seem to take the healing for granted. Which is confusing considering they just got healed from a hideous disease. So what are we being told here?

We know about love and loving our neighbours is to love our enemies. I wonder if the same thing is being done here for gratitude. What I am trying to say is – we know that love is more than a feeling. To love is a way of being in the world. The problem with love being reduced to just a feeling is that It is hard to love our enemies – if not impossible. But it is possible to act lovingly towards them. To open up ourselves to God's love working through us into the lives of others, even those that hurt and anger us the most in the world. We can accept that our enemies are fellow children of God and refuse to return harm to them – breaking the cycle of 'an eye for an eye'. This means letting go of some of our anger and our own bruised egos and letting God's love work through us and by living in love we are healed. Our anger is soothed by the love of God and it gets easier and easier to love others – even our enemies. The same could be said with gratitude. Gratitude is more than a feeling.

We have all been in situations in life where we have felt more cursed than blessed. Sometimes the situations we find ourselves in can be so hard and

traumatic that it can feel 'impossible' to be grateful for anything. But if gratitude and thankfulness is like 'love' and more than a feeling, then like 'love' is a way of acting and of being in the world. Living a life of gratefulness is living a life that recognises our lives are dependent on God's grace and we are thankful for the love that we have in our lives. Living in gratefulness is knowing that our lives are inseparable from the grace of God. What do we mean by 'grace'? Grace is the gift of godself in our lives. That we are constantly nourished by the source of all life – even when times are tough. This is the gratitude and thankfulness shown by the Samaritan who after being healed, stops and turns to Christ and thanks God.

To be 'ungrateful' or to 'live in sin' is to live in the illusion that we are independent of God's grace. That we are self-made and have done everything that we have on our own. To think in this manner is awfully tempting but one must watch that they do not fall into the trap of thinking that they themselves are 'God' and masters of their own destinies. This is the attitude we see in the Jewish lepers who after being healed by Christ continue on their way with no recognition of God's grace working through their lives. God is the source of life and we are the recipients of life. We are called to live a life that is lived in love and thankfulness.

Jesus lived a life in gratitude. We see Jesus time and time again thanking God the Father. With only five loaves and two fish – we see Jesus give thanks, break this bread and feed the 5000. One would think that this may have been a cause for panic – five loaves and two fish with 5000 mouths could have been the source for a major catering fail. Instead Jesus just gives thanks and there is enough to go around. More specifically – Jesus broke the bread and gave it all away. At the last supper when emotions were high – they were on the brink of Jesus' death and what does Jesus do? He gives thanks, he breaks the bread and he gives it all away.

When we enter into Eucharist – which means?

We are giving thanks to our God who gave it all away for us. Who went to the cross and gave up life itself for us. When we reach out our hands to receive the bread and wine – we are asking to be transformed into people who live in love and gratitude – people who let the love of God flow through their lives and are grateful. When we receive the bread and wine we are promised health and the fullness of life and can live in the knowledge that death has no dominion over us – we know that our existence will always continue on with God and we are able to trust our lives to the God who is the source of all life. This is how we find our salvation 'the fullness of health' by living in love and gratitude.

Remembering that everything we have and everything that we are is because
God is.