

[00:11](#)

[inaudible].

[00:12](#)

Hello and welcome to this episode of the St Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. And as I record this podcast, we're just starting a new year and we're starting a new decade, actually 2020. Uh, I don't want to sound really old, um, but where on earth does the time go? It's 2020 already - unbelievable. Um, and as with each new year, uh, we tend to look back on what has gone before and we give thanks to God for the good things and we recommit ourselves to try and avoid the mistakes of the past as we journey into the future. And we also look forward, don't we? We look forward to where life is going to take us. Uh, we start looking forward to what sort of people we want to be, what it is that we actually want to achieve in our lives, and we recommit ourselves to serving God as best we can.

[01:09](#)

And as we look back and look forward, I hope that at the heart of all that we're feeling is a sense of gratitude because we want to thank God for what he's done for us in the past. And we want to thank God that he's leading us into the future that he has prepared for us. Gratitude is such a wonderful disposition to hold in our hearts, isn't it? It's certainly a character trait worth cultivating if we can. And in this podcast, I want to think about a passage from Luke's gospel, from Luke chapter 17, verses 11 to 19 which is fundamentally a story from the life of Jesus that teaches us a lot about gratitude. Um, it's the story of the healing of the lepers. And if you remember, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee, and 10 lepers had traveled quite some distance to come to him for healing.

[02:10](#)

Now, presumably they had heard tales of miraculous healing, uh, presumably word had reached their leper colony of the incredible acts of this traveling holy man. So, uh, you know, why wouldn't they want to go out and see for themselves? But for them to actually go out and meet with Jesus wouldn't have been as easy as we might think. Uh, lepers, we probably know were segregated into colonies. They were ostracized from the mainstream of society. They were punished for their sins, so it was believed, by God striking them down with this deadly disease. And there were very strict rules about, um, where they could stand and how they could present themselves in public. Uh, for example, Leviticus chapter 13, it says this, "A person who has a dreaded skin disease, must wear torn clothes, leave his hair uncombed, cover the lower part of his face and call out, 'unclean, unclean'".

[03:13](#)

Um, in Numbers 5, it says, "everyone with a dreaded skin disease must be sent out so they will not defile the camp where God lives among his people". So in specifics, it's thought that lepers had to stand at least 50 yards downwind when they were, um, coming anywhere near the clean people of society. And in this story, as Luke tells it, um, it says, "Keeping their distance, the lepers called out saying, 'Jesus, Master. Have mercy on us'". And then we get that beautiful biblical phrase that recurs in the gospel. It says, "Jesus saw them". I love that phrase so much. "Jesus saw them". So many people would have looked at them. So many people would have, um, judged their appearance. So many people

would've stared and turned away in disgust at what they'd seen. But Jesus saw them, which is to say that he looked below their exterior, he looked below their disfigurements and he saw the beautiful person beneath. Jesus saw them just as he sees you.

[04:38](#)

And just as he sees me, and he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests". Now that would have been part of the Jewish law of the day. If a leper was cured, they had to go to the priest and get a certificate stating officially that they were now clean. And only when they had that certificate would they be allowed to go back home. And so the 10 lepers set out to see the priest. And to be fair to all 10, there is an act of faith here because as of yet, none of them had actually been healed. And yet they obeyed Jesus' words to head off to the priests as if they had been healed. And because of their faith, we're told that as they went, they were made clean. Now we can't imagine the celebrations that must have ensued. They were clean again.

[05:28](#)

The disease was gone. Their separation, their isolation from society was at an end. They can now go home and return to their husbands and wives, their parents, their children. The nightmare was finally over. And of course as a result, um, that which had, uh, bonded them as a unit was now gone. They were free to go their own ways. Perhaps it was a bit like being army buddies together who may have spent months, even years living together, working together, sleeping together. But when they're discharged, they go their own way and they resume their separate lives. As united as they had been as lepers, they were probably quite glad to go their separate ways and begin rebuilding their shattered lives. And so the, the company of ex lepers split up and we are left then with two questions. Firstly, what happened to the other nine? Um, only one of them goes back to say thank you? What happened to the other nine? And secondly, why did the 10th leper go back and say thank you? Well, let's think about those two questions now.

[06:54](#)

So first of all, what happened to the other nine who didn't go back to Jesus and say, thank you? Well, I think we need to be careful not to read something into this passage that simply isn't there. There's no reason to believe that the nine lepers who didn't go back to Jesus were just rude or ungrateful. I mean, it doesn't say that. And actually I think it'd be a bit silly to infer that. I mean, of course they would have been grateful. Of course they would have felt indebted to Jesus. He transformed their lives. He'd restored them to wholeness. And after all, they were following his orders to go to see the priests. So the truth is that rather than standing in judgment over those nine and harboring a thought in our hearts that they were ungrateful, perhaps we need to just show them a bit of grace and rejoice with them about their healing and what a difference it have made to them.

[07:47](#)

And perhaps in the sheer moment of wonder and delight, they were so caught up in their transformed world that they simply didn't think of coming back to say thank you to Jesus. I hope that's, uh, a slightly more charitable reading of the passage rather than inferring an ungrateful spirit on these healed people

that simply isn't there in the text. The point I'm trying to make really is this, that there are many people who do not come to Jesus each week. There are many people in our communities who do not come to worship God, and it's unlikely that this is through a spirit of ungratefulness. These people probably love their lives. They're happy in their relationships, they are truly grateful for all they have, but they may not equate the blessings of their lives with the grace of God who is our provider. And so if we begin from this more charitable perspective, uh, the way we do mission and evangelism changes, uh, we begin from a position of respect.

[08:52](#)

We begin by acknowledging the good intent of those who are not in a relationship with Christ. When Paul was in Athens, he modeled that for us in his sermon. He started with these words. He said, "I see that in every way you Athenians are very religious. That which you worship then even though you do not know it is what I now proclaim to you". This is perhaps a, um, good and respectful approach to take in mission and evangelism. Rather than trying to convince people of what filthy, dirty, rotten sinners they are, they must repent of their spiritual disease uh, we can acknowledge that most people are seeking spirituality; that most people are seeking a, um, transcendent experience - but through their family life, through their appreciation of the arts, through their love of gardening, through their enjoyment of Sunday walks or whatever it is. And like Paul, uh, we can say to them, what you are striving for is good, but let us introduce you to the God who stands behind all this.

[10:06](#)

The God who stands behind art, the God who stands behind family life, the God who stands behind the garden, and the beauty of creation. The truth is that, um, expressing gratitude is often more complex than it first appears. So we don't know where the nine lepers went. We don't know in truth, um, where many people in our own communities stand with God. But Jesus knows where they are. He knows those who are seeking. He knows those who are confused or just preoccupied with life. He knows those who are desperately longing for something more, but maybe too busy providing for the family or caring for an elderly relative or tending to a sick child or whatever. Jesus knows who they are and Jesus will seek them out.

[11:13](#)

So that's the nine. But what about the one leper who did return? Why did he come back? What was in it for him? We've got a very graphic and beautiful description of his return to Jesus. Now think about the phrases used about his return. It says he praised God with a loud voice. Now previously, he would have been silenced by the shame of his disease. It says he prostrated himself at Jesus' feet, well previously he had to stand 50 yards downwind. It says he thanked Jesus previously, he would not have had any social with Jesus at all. So why did the leper return to Jesus? Well the truth is that we just don't know. Uh, maybe, um, maybe he'd grown up under the discipline of his mum telling him to mind his P's and Q's and that he just did it instinctively. Maybe that's the case, who knows? But I think the important thing here is the fact that the ex leper realized that gratitude is worked out through relationship.

[12:36](#)

Gratitude is worked out through relationship. If you are truly grateful to someone, you will want to build a relationship with them. And so the ex leper, um, returned to his healer, not just to utter the words, thank you, but to form a relationship with him. And the nature of that relationship is shown in his body language praising God, prostrating himself, thanking Jesus. The relationship was one of utter dependence and what the ex leper desired more than anything else was a deep intimacy with Jesus through which he could show his love and his respect for God. And perhaps that is the lesson of the ex leper to us as well. That it's one thing to offer words of thanks to God for what he gives us, but the calling of the Christian life is actually a seeking after intimacy with Jesus; that we are to express our love and our gratitude and our intimacy with Christ through the rituals and the practices of worship, whether that's praying or, um, sharing the Eucharist or singing hymns or whatever.

[14:05](#)

Um, we should use them, uh, not as an end in themselves, but as a way towards deeper intimacy with God through which we rejoice in our healing and we celebrate our dependence on Christ. The truth is that gratitude, um, is not an action. Gratitude is not something we do. Gratitude is a state of mind. Gratitude is a way of being, and that works itself out through our worship of God and through spending times of intimacy with Jesus in prayer and worship and reflection. And just as the, ex-leper was transformed physically, emotionally, and socially, so Jesus wants to effect a physical, emotional, and social transformation in each one of us as we receive his healing touch on our lives. So we are transformed in every way. Perhaps today if we come to Jesus and proclaim with the 10 lepers, "Jesus, Master have mercy on us", we too will receive the healing that we need. We too will be transformed and then we too will live out the rest of our lives in a mindset of gratitude that will transform how we are in our bodies, how we are in our minds, and then of course that will overflow positively and impact our local community as well so that God's name will be glorified, uh, both in us and through us. That attitude of gratitude that pursues intimacy with Jesus, for what he has done for us will transform our world and the world around us.

[16:22](#)

[inaudible]

[16:22](#)

So thank you for listening to this podcast today. I hope it's been helpful for you. If you've got any comments or questions, then please do drop me an email. It's always lovely to have your feedback, uh, from these podcasts. Um, my email address is steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Um, and, uh, wherever you are, whatever you're doing today, I hope that you will have a deep sense of God's blessing in your life and that you will continually develop a sense of gratitude for all that he's done for you through his Son Jesus Christ. Bye.