

“Awe and Gratitude”

Psalm 66:1-6, Psalm 111, Luke 17:11-19

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

This is an awe-inspiring account of the grace of God to heal a person from another religion. An account of wonder revealing, God sees the goodness in each of us, has compassionate power to heal us and is loving for the salvation of humankind, even despised outsiders.

Lepers were suffering from some sort of contagious disease. Those afflicted were subjected to a number of social taboos and religious purification requirements. The law protected society by stipulating that lepers remain isolated from the community and warn others not to come too close. Thus, as Jesus approached, the lepers called to him from afar: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”. The fact that the lepers address Jesus as “Master”, as a person in authority—is unusual. This is the only instance in which Jesus is referred to as Master by someone not a disciple. The quality of mercy is an expectation connected with the coming of God. How did the lepers know Jesus was all powerful, compassionate, gracious, forgiving and a healer? They couldn’t go to temple, read scripture or hear about Jesus from others for they were excluded, outcast and isolated. Did they know God through awe and wonder of nature, prayer, heighten perception that came from being separate from the cares and distractions of the world?

The next sentence begins with: “When Jesus saw them”. Because their disease was potentially contagious and was wrongly considered to be God’s judgment, lepers were shunned and treated as invisible people. The fact that Jesus saw them is an indication of his compassion for those who suffer and are marginalized by the world.

Unfortunately, there are still people that assume one’s health and success is a blessing from God that comes from faith, obedience, and works. Conversely, that disease, suffering and calamities are God’s judgement. Neither fit with our gracious God who loves everyone. The healing of the lepers exposes the assumptions of, works blessings and suffering is judgement, as both being incorrect. Jesus healed the lepers who did nothing to merit the healing. The fact that Jesus saw them and healed them proclaims that misfortunates are never the judgement of God.

“Jesus saw them.” Jesus saw them as beloved brothers. Jesus saw their goodness. Jesus saw their leprosy as part of the restrictive clay temporary shell we call our physical body. Jesus knew that leprosy, every imperfection, every instance lacking love, are all temporary and will be healed by God.

We are to see people as God sees people. Seeing the goodness in each other. Seeing the love, joy, peace, giftedness, and uniqueness of each other’s soul. We are to see with compassion, mercy, and grace. We are to see deeper than the surface, beyond blue eyes, brown eyes, bald, hairy, thin, fat, male, female, fancy clothes, dirty rags, back, white, rich, poor. We are to see every person as a wonderful sibling.

We are in a season in this country where we are starting to see beyond the color of each other’s skin. My sense is race relations are not getting worse instead we are pulling off the veil of ignorance of racism and finally starting to truly see each other. Our seeing coupled with compassion enables us to listen, learn, talk and establish a world where we do not judge based on color or categorize by race, instead, we see everyone as a beloved person. Pulling back the veil that has hindered our seeing is chaotic, some are fighting to keep their veil on. We are called to follow Jesus in seeing everyone. Seeing for Jesus meant being compassionate and gracious, healing and helping everyone, welcoming everyone into community.

Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priest, who at that time determined whether they might rejoin the community. Since they are now healed and cleaned, the priest would be required to bless them and welcome them into community. Which is the greater miracle, the healing of the disease or their inclusion into community? How do you think the priest felt about blessing the Samaritan and welcoming him into community? How many people in the community clinged to their veil, avoided him, and shunned him? Jesus desired for all of them to be joyfully welcomed into the community even the double outsider, the pagan Samaritan.

Ten people were healed and welcomed into community. One person was grateful, worshiped God and was made well. Faith is praising God, thanking God and worshiping God. Faith is gratitude. God loves through our awe and gratitude to make us well.

There is more here than the awe and gratitude of one who was cured of a debilitating and ostracizing disease. In a surprising twist to the story, this man was a Samaritan—a foreigner who lived outside the covenant community of Israel. The Samaritan is an example of faithful living. He foreshadows the opening of God's Kingdom to all people. Jesus then asks about the other nine who were cured. We presume them to be Jews. They were healed and welcomed into community; however, since they lacked awe and gratitude they were not made well. The Samaritan is a vivid demonstration of the love and power of God over all ills and wrongs, the power of God's love to fill us with awe, wonder, joy, peace, and love. In the final analysis, ten were healed, but only one was well.

Is Jesus' teaching that how we live, with love, awe, gratitude, peace and joy, is much more important than knowledge of religion, following the law, practices, ritual, tradition, worship location and worship elements? Is Jesus teaching that awe and gratitude is the key to being truly well? Is Jesus teaching that we experience a slice of heaven whenever we worship with awe and gratitude? Brian Stoffregen said, "Gratitude may be the purest measure of one's character and spiritual condition."

Eugene Peterson wrote. "Our four gospel writers all complete their narrations of the gospel of Jesus with a story of Jesus' resurrection. They come at it from different directions and provide different details, but one element is common to each of them: a sense of wonder, astonishment, surprise. The first people involved in Jesus' resurrection were totally involved in dealing with his death. Now they had to do a complete about-face and deal with life. As they experienced life, they were suffused with wonder."

The psalmist sings, **Psalm 111 MSG "Hallelujah! I give thanks to God with everything I've got—Wherever good people gather, and in the congregation. God's works are so great, worth a lifetime of study—endless enjoyment! Splendor and beauty mark God's craft; God's generosity never gives out. God's miracles are God's memorial—This God of Grace, this God of Love. God gave food to those who reverence God, God remembered to keep God's ancient promise. God proved to God's people that God could do what God said: Hand them the nations on a platter—a gift! God manufactures truth and justice; All God's products are guaranteed to last—Never out-of-date, never obsolete, rust-proof. All that God makes and does is honest and true: God paid the ransom for God's people, God ordered God's Covenant kept forever. God's so personal and holy, worthy of our respect. The good life begins in the reverence of God—Do that and you'll know the blessing of God. God's Hallelujah lasts forever!"**

Majestic Redwood trees, the harmonious Hallelujah Chorus, the peacefulness of the boundary waters, the invigorating sensation of a hug, the thunderous thrill of a last second victory at Viking's stadium, the enormity of a starry night, the dancing of your taste buds over a delicious taste, the compassion of a listening friend, the lush aroma of como conservatory on a bitter cold winter day, the uplifting laughter of a child, the elation from your body doing all the right motions in your sport, the charisma of a good friend, the steadfast encouragement of family, the joyous laughter of Minnehaha Falls, the grace of an unexpected gift, the love of life. What fills you with awe?

Awe is being overwhelmed with splendor. Awe is a positive feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends our understanding of the world. God delights in filling us with awe. Awe and gratitude make us well.

Awe makes us better people. Awe is the ultimate "collective" emotion, according to research reported in The New York Times, because "awe motivates people to do things that enhance the greater good." Awe "shifts our focus from our narrow self-interest to the interests of the group to which we belong." Researchers have found that people who experience more awe in their lives are more generous to

strangers. They also cooperate more, share more resources and sacrifice more for others -- behaviors which enhance our life as a community. So how does this happen? One answer, according to researchers, is that "awe imbues people with a different sense of themselves, one that is smaller, more humble and part of something larger." Even brief experiences with awe "lead people to feel less narcissistic and entitled and more attuned to the common humanity people share with one another." Awe reminds us that we are all small individuals, but we are part of something larger. It makes us more humble and connected to God and our world wide community. Seek out what gives you awe. Through awe, God will make you well.

The psalmist sings, **Psalm 66:1-6 MSG** **"All together now—applause for God! Sing songs to the tune of God's glory, set glory to the rhythms of God's praise. Say of God, "We've never seen anything like God!"...The whole earth falls to its knees—it worships you, sings to you, can't stop enjoying your name and fame. Take a good look at God's wonders—they'll take your breath away. God converted sea to dry land; travelers crossed the river on foot. Now isn't that cause for a song?"**

Splendor, love, majesty, joy, glory are in us and all around us and all around the world. Pay attention to that which fills you with wonder and awe.

Philip Britts wrote:

"How often do we miss the fainter note
Or fail to see the more exquisite hue,
Blind to the tiny streamlet
at our feet, Eyes fixed upon some other, further view.

What chimes of harmonies escape our ears,

How many rainbows must elude our sight,

We see a field but do not see the grass,
Each blade a miracle of shade and light. How then to keep the
greater end in eye And watch the sunlight on the distant peak,

And yet not tread on any leaf of love,
Nor miss a word the eager children speak?

Ah, what demand upon the narrow heart,
To seek the whole, yet not ignore the part."

Gerald May wrote, "Willingness and willfulness do not apply to specific things or situations. They reflect instead the underlying attitude one has toward the wonder of life itself. Willingness notices this wonder and bows in some kind of reverence to it. Willfulness forgets it, ignores it, or at its worst, actively tries to destroy it. Thus willingness can sometimes seem very active and assertive, even aggressive. And willfulness can appear in the guise of passivity."

Teresa of Avila said, "May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love. It is there for each and every one of us."

God loves through awe and gratitude to make us well. Amen