

“Seeing Transforming Grace”

Luke 17:11-19

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Prayer for Understanding Gracious God open our ears, clear our minds, and renew our souls. Help us perceive you clearly. Transform us into your likeness. Fill us with wonder, awe, gratitude, and love so we will shine with your blessings. Amen.

C. S. Lewis wrote: “We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; joy is praises appointed consummation.” My interpretation of that is, there is joy in seeing transforming grace and praising God.

God’s transforming grace is freely given to all people. Jesus’ passion in Jerusalem reveals God’s grace. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus is continually on the move revealing transforming grace in his teaching and healing on the road to the ultimate revelation of grace the resurrection in Jerusalem. In today’s scripture, that road goes through an “in between land” that is neither Samaria nor Galilee. As Jesus walks through this no-man’s land, he transforms it into everyone’s land. Jesus removes every barrier. Jesus transforms every place making it possible for everyone to see God’s transforming grace.

Luke 17:11-19 NLT “As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. As Jesus entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Jesus saw them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, “Praise God!” He fell to the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking Jesus for what God had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” And Jesus said to the man, “Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you.

The lepers are isolated. They are prohibited from being close to anyone. All of humanity’s disease, suffering, and sin does not make Jesus unclean; instead, Jesus makes everyone clean. The diseased cry for grace to cure them and admit them back into community. Jesus sees them, the visible and invisible. Jesus sees their disease and isolation. Jesus sees them as a beloved sibling. Jesus sees their future wholeness in heaven for eternity.

The priests were the gatekeepers of the community. Jesus instructs the healed to show themselves to the priests which indicates that they will be accepted back into community. It is shocking that even the Samaritan will be welcomed into a Jewish community. Jesus mentioning the priests seems to emphasize that being social outcast is often as painful as a physical malady. The saying should be “sticks and stones may break my bones and words may also hurt me.”

Nine of the healed men did exactly as Jesus instructed. They showed themselves to the priest and we can assume they were welcomed back into community where they worshiped God and strived to follow Old Testament law. Today, you might say they returned to being church members who worship regularly and give of their time and talents.

One man, shocking, a despised foreign, an outcast saw more. We are not given any specifics of the transforming grace this Samaritan saw. We are only told the effects of his seeing transforming grace, which is joyful, grateful worship. Sometimes people ask why belong to a church, why strive to be good and loving, if we are all saved in the end by grace alone? The answer is anyone who sees the transforming grace of God is filled with passionate, joyful grateful worship, and a desire to grow in love. Jesus seems sad for the nine who were healed and still blind to transforming grace. Perhaps, their worship was going through the motions, trying to earn God’s love. Is the extent to which one truly worships, praises and glorifies God, is grateful and joyful, in direct proportion to their ability to see God’s transforming grace?

Some people see the mess of the world and lose hope. Seeing transforming grace fills one with hope. Some people see the hurts that are caused by the broken, human aspect of the church and become frustrated. Seeing transforming grace celebrates every way someone experiences grace. Some people measure a church with statistics and become anxious. Seeing transforming grace encourages with the infinite majesty of God’s love that will fulfill all our good dreams.

Is an aspect of this account that nine people were seeking community in human formed religion and one person was seeking community in the heavenly kingdom? Few things are fully completed on earth. We made

numerous improvements to this church building this past year and there will always be more to do. One can form wonderful new good habits and there will always be ways we can live more fully on earth. On earth everything is in constant transition, all is being transformed. Some transformations take thousands of years. Focusing on all that there is yet to do is often discouraging. God sightings; seeing love expand, forgiveness, peace, laughter; seeing transforming grace fills one with joyful, grateful worship, a passion to love extravagantly.

Two ways of life are contrasted in our scripture. Nine return to an old way of life and worship. One sees more dimensions of grace in their cure. Their worship is passionate, joyful, and grateful. In worship, nine see God as the director, the priests as the actors and themselves as the audience. They leave worship analyzing how was it? One sees God as the audience, the priest as the directors and themselves as they actor. They leave worship asking, how did I do and did God enjoy my worship? When the one joyfully, gratefully worshiped God, it reveals their desire to follow the way of life Jesus advocated, their passion to share transforming grace, to love all, to welcome all. Jesus instructs the one to get up and go, not to return to old ways rather to find ways that are ever growing in love, to live life abundantly, to hope audaciously, to love extravagantly. As Presbyterians, we say we are once reformed always reforming. Our expanding ways of love flow from our seeing God's transforming grace. The one is going beyond healing to wholeness. The one returned to Jesus, the conduit of transforming grace, to see more grace, to walk further on the road to resurrection. The one lived in the shadow of the cross, the life robbing disease, the death of relationships. The one now sees an aspect of Easter.

Richard Rohr believes that one who expresses enthusiasm perceives God more completely. Enthusiastic persons, people full of energy and glad to be alive, see more transforming grace than those who just go through the motions of observing their religion. The word enthusiasm itself gives us this clue. It comes from *en*, meaning "in," and *theos*, meaning "God": in God, possessed by God, inspired by God. The people who give glory to God are those who are so full of life they exude gratitude.

The poet E. E. Cummings radiated such vitality with these words:

*I thank You God for this amazing day:
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;*

and for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes.

Pastor Victoria Curtiss inspired aspects of the reminder of this message. Those who are joyful and grateful see more than meets the eyes, they are seeing an array of dimensions of God's transforming grace. They are more than going through the busyness of everyday life, they are seeing emerging, expanding love. They are more than living life, they are seeing life as abundant. They are more than seeing healing, they are seeing the transformation of forgiveness. They are more than seeing trees bear fruit, they are seeing a world where all have more than enough. They are more than seeing the sun rise, they are seeing God's giving of a fresh start every day, God's steadfast love and God's grace always afresh. God is at work here. Joy bursts forth. People are made whole. Gratitude inspires people to praise God and expand their love.

Gratitude is important in the dynamic of giving and receiving. From the giver's side, the act of giving is incomplete until the gift is received and savored. Gifts are often given to deepen the relationship with the recipient.

The psalms have a persistent demand that we "praise God." This troubled C. S. Lewis when he was a young man: Why was God constantly asking praise for Godself? Is God so self-preoccupied? Why does God need us to keep telling God how great God is? We want a God who is people-centered, not God-centered. But then Lewis observed that if we fail to admire great art, for instance, we have missed something. The art isn't poorer for our refusing to admire it, but we are. When we fail to praise God, we are missing something. When we praise God, we connect with God, and God communicates and connects with us. We enjoy one another. We delight in each other. We are enthusiastic, that is "in God". Praising God enhances our grace vision. Lewis thought that praise is spiritual health made audible. Praise is what spontaneously overflows from enjoyment.

The world rings with praise—lovers adoring one another, readers affirming their favorite poet, walkers admiring the countryside, athletes delighting in their favorite sport; praise of one's favorite weather, vintage wines, delicious dishes, talented actors, smooth-running cars, fast horses, quality colleges, beautiful landscape, historical wonders, playful children, pretty flowers, magnificent mountains, rare stamps, unusual beetles, uplifting music. Just as people spontaneously praise what they value, so they spontaneously urge others to join them in praising it: "Wasn't it glorious?" "Don't you think that is magnificent?" When the psalmists tell everyone to praise God, they are doing what people do when they speak enthusiastically of what they care about. They want to share their joy with others and want others to join in their excitement and gratitude. God made us so that "all enjoyment spontaneously overflows

into praise.” We cannot help but praise and rejoice in what we most enjoy. The enjoyment itself is stunted and hindered if it is never expressed in joyful celebration.

Lewis thought that praise completes enjoyment; joy is praise’s consummation, worship is praising appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed. Joy is expanded when one discovers an inspiring new author and has someone eager to listen to how that author has inspired them. Joy grows when we share our glimpses of God’s transforming grace. God’s pursuit of our praise is for our own health and wholeness. Our satisfaction in God is incomplete until we express our praise to God.

St. Teresa of Avila wrote:

*Love once said to me, “I know a song, would you like to hear it?”
And laughter came from every brick in the street and from every pore in the sky.
After a night of prayer, God changed my life when God sang, “Enjoy me.”*

The glory of God is a person fully alive. God’s efforts to elicit our grateful praise is both a way God reveals God’s relentless love for us and a way God is glorified. In her book *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker wrote a dialogue between two women about God. “One day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, God come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what God was. In fact, when God happens, you can’t miss God. . . . Listen, God love everything you love—and a mess of stuff you don’t. But more than anything else, God loves admiration. You say God vain? Naw. Not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it ticks God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice God. What God do when God ticked off? Oh, God make something else. People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see God always trying to please us back. . . . God always making little surprises and springing them on us when we least expect.”

God has filled the cosmos with “love you” notes. God showers love on us and is saying “notice me.” God desires our attention, our praise, our gratitude. God desires a dynamic relationship with us. God desires for us to enjoy life, to be amazed, enthusiastic and adoring. God desires to share our joy with us and for us to share our joy with God, because God knows we become whole when we experience joy and express our gratitude. So open wide your soul’s eye to God’s transforming grace, be grateful, rejoice, be glad, praise God for this is a way God is making you whole. Amen.