



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“Ten Healed, One Saved”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 66:1-12; Luke 17:11-19

*This sermon was preached by Dr. James T. Rogers. on Sunday,
October 16, 2022 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in
Charleston, South Carolina.*

Before I read our gospel lesson, I do want you to know that I thought it was a little risky for Dr. Siegling to invite one of the associate pastors to preach during stewardship season. You’ve probably noticed he’s not here today. Maybe he’s staying away just in case my sermon goes south? But don’t worry, he’ll be back this week to put out any fires I start this morning.

In all seriousness, I know that the Stewardship Committee expects me to talk this morning about the importance of tithing, share how God calls us to be cheerful givers, and offer a reminder that you are invited to make your pledge by next Sunday when we have our Stewardship Celebration. Well, now that I’ve checked those three boxes, let us hear from Luke’s gospel.

Our New Testament Lesson comes from chapter seventeen, verses eleven through nineteen. This can be found on page 852 in the pew Bible.

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten men with a skin disease approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus’s feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? So where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Did none of them return to give glory to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

In 1966, Brooks Tuck, a Baptist minister turned educator, was serving as principal at a white elementary school in segregated Henry County south of Atlanta. When the courts ordered the school system to integrate, Tuck volunteered his school which angered many people in his community and he received death threats and bomb scares. Thirteen black families decided to send their children to Tuck’s school and when the bus carrying those children arrived at Fairview Elementary, they were met by an angry mob of protesters which frightened the children. Undeterred by insults and threats from the crowd, Tuck climbed aboard the bus and welcomed the children saying, “We are going to get through this together.” And he took each child by the hand and led them inside the school. Eventually, things got better.¹

¹ “Heroes are closer than you might think.” *Charleston City Paper*, March 30, 2022.

In today's reading from Luke, it is not school children in need of help, but a group of ten men. Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem, near Samaria and Galilee, and he enters a village where ten men with leprosy approach him, and keeping their distance, call out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Because of the condition of their skin and the fear that they were contagious, these men lived in total isolation from the rest of the community. John Buchanan, a past Parramore Preacher, writes, "It is difficult to exaggerate the social alienation and isolation of these ten men."² Their skin condition keeps them separated from their wives, children, and faith community, leading them to form their own group. Biblical law actually required them to live outside the community and to cry out, "Unclean, unclean," when anyone came near. If a person with leprosy were to recover, a priest had to declare that they were clean before they could reenter the community. Given their dire situation, they often placed themselves near busy roads and pathways to ask for help.

As Jesus enters the village he sees them. He sees these men who may have been often overlooked or avoided, passed by without a second thought, and just background noise for people living busy lives. Jesus sees them just like the Good Samaritan saw the man left on the side of the road. Unlike the priest and the Levite who pass by on the other side, and like the Good Samaritan, Jesus sees this opportunity to show mercy, saying, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And without a word, these men follow Jesus' instruction, head to the priests, and as they went, a miracle: they were made clean. And if that was the end of the story, surely that would be enough: a story of Jesus healing those who are suffering from an ostracizing skin condition and welcoming them back to the community.

I think in some ways we can relate to that story, for many of us know what it's like to cry out to Jesus for help and have our prayers answered. This is the story of the broken relationship that was reconciled, the surgery that brought relief from immense pain, the medication that reduced our anxiety, the job offer that provided for our family, the sense of peace that came following the death of a loved one. The story of Jesus providing the healing we need is always enough.

But this isn't a simple healing story. Because one of the men, one of the ten sees that he is healed and he turns back. On the way to show the priests, be declared clean, and be welcomed back into the community, he turns around. He praises God with a loud voice and he lays down at Jesus' feet and thanks him. Only one of the ten comes back to express gratitude, and get this, the one who returns isn't even a Jew, but a Samaritan, a foreigner, considered by Jews to be unclean based on marriage practices and looked down upon greatly.

If that isn't enough, Jesus then makes a strange pronouncement, saying, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." What an interesting thing for Jesus to say, given that all ten were healed of their disease. There must be something different about this man than the others. He returns to Jesus, praising God and expressing gratitude and Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." Translated another way, Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you."³ There must be some connection between the man's faith and his gratitude, for in the midst of praising God and

² Buchanan, John, "Luke 17:11-19: Homiletical Perspective." *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4 (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville: 2010), p. 167.

³ Craddock, Fred, "The Grateful Leper." *Interpretation: Luke* (John Knox Press, Louisville: 1990), p. 203.

thanking Jesus, this man didn't just experience a healing. The other nine were healed, but only he received Jesus' declaration of salvation.

Having been healed of his skin condition, the Samaritan could have simply enjoyed his good fortune of being healed and welcomed back into the community. Or he could have spent his time grieving all that was lost during his time of separation, the weeks, months, and years spent disconnected, the sense of shame, and the pain of the sores. He could have seen his healing simply as something he deserved, given all the suffering he endured. Yet, differently from the others, he focuses on gratitude which leads him to return to Jesus and experience salvation, which completely changes his life.

As you know, gratitude to God can be transformative in our lives as well. Church member Howard Edwards Senior, who died in 2014, had a habit that I'll never forget. As a part of his offering ritual, Howard would write on the back of his offering envelopes an important list: the things he was thankful to God for – the blessings in his life. Can you imagine how that impacted his experience of giving to the church? As he listed those blessings in this life on those offering envelopes, his offering could not be understood as some bill or obligation to be paid, but instead a joyful expression of gratitude to the God who gives us all good things.

Several times a week I see a man named Bernard at a park in the Eastside neighborhood of Charleston. He always greets me when I am passing through and he seems to spend most of his time under the cover of a bus stop shelter. About a month ago I stopped by the park and he wasn't there. One week passed, two weeks, three, and four, and there was no sign of Bernard. And then last Wednesday I stopped by the park and Bernard is back with a big smile on his face and a warm welcome. I ask him where he has been and he shares a difficult story. He spent twenty-eight days in a local hospital dealing with a bad infection and he lost a toe. But he is healthy again and feeling better than he has in a long time. And do you know what he says to me? And he doesn't know that I am a pastor. Bernard says, "Thanks to God for my healing. Thanks to God, for my health." I imagine that there are so many challenges that Bernard could be focusing on right now, yet he's out on the sidewalk praising God. Can you imagine how Bernard's gratitude transforms his life?

This week a seminary classmate of mine shared with me a resource called the *Alphabet of Gratitude*. This daily spiritual practice invites the participant to reflect on a word for each letter of the alphabet using definitions, questions, quotes and scriptures with the hope that one will recognize gratitude in unexpected places. Here's a sample. A is for abundance: marked by a great plenty. Second Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." Where do you find abundance in your life? How do you give thanks for it?⁴ Can you imagine how a daily spiritual practice of gratitude might transform your life?

To practice gratitude changes us as individuals, but it also changes congregations as well. Kimberly Long writes,

⁴ Vibrant Church Communications, *Alphabet of Gratitude* [<https://vibrantchurchcommunications.com/alphabet-of-gratitude-resources>], October 13, 2022.

When Christians practice gratitude, they come to worship not just to “get something out of it,” but to give thanks and praise to God. Stewardship is transformed from fundraising to the glad gratitude of joyful givers. The mission of the church changes from ethical duty to the work of grateful hands and hearts. Prayer includes not only our intercessions and supplications, but also our thanksgivings at the table.⁵

Communal gratitude is the theme of today’s Psalm.⁶ This Psalm is honest and shares that there have been troubles. God’s people have been tested, tried, and burdened. They have endured suffering, yet God has delivered them. This Psalm is a prayer of thanksgiving remembering God’s saving work in freeing the Hebrew slaves and leading them to the Promised Land. And it’s a prayer of thanksgiving calling all the earth to praise God.

I’m so thankful for the ways that gratitude is so central to our lives as a faith community here at First (Scots). This week I’ve been thinking about Rob Dillon and Gordon Bondurant leading us at Wednesday Night Supper as we sing the Moravian Blessing which acknowledges the gift of food and concludes with “may we respond with gratitude.” I’ve been thinking about when we held our congregational meeting to call Dr. Siegling to be our Senior Pastor. After the unanimous vote, we stood and sang today’s Hymn of Reflection: “Now Thank We All Our God.” I’ve been thinking about all of the cards our youth have received from the congregation after they baked cookies, delivered meals, and led worship. Maybe you saw the bulletin board of thank you notes at the ministry fair last Sunday?

We really don’t know much about the Samaritan in today’s story from Luke’s gospel. We don’t hear anything about his theology or moral values. We don’t what he thinks about the hot button issues of his day, how much he places in the treasury, or how he votes. But we do know that he received a gift and he returned to say thank you and because of that, he we are certain that he experienced salvation and his life was forever changed.

John Buchanan writes,

The basic response to God is gratitude: gratitude for the gift of life, gratitude for the world, gratitude for the dear people God has given us to enrich and grace our lives. The basic Christian experience is gratitude to God for God’s love in Jesus Christ and the accompanying gift of hopeful confidence and wholeness and wellness that comes with it, regardless of the worldly circumstances in which we find ourselves.⁷

Anne Lamott has two favorite prayers. In the morning, it’s “Help me. Help me. Help me.” At bedtime it’s “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

Brooks Tuck was a big help to those thirteen school children who integrated Fairview Elementary in 1966. Many years later Tuck got sick and spent a lot of time in the hospital, floating in and out of consciousness. Even so, he realized that one particular African American nurse spent a lot of time at his bedside, and he asked her why she didn’t go home to her family. The nurse replied,

⁵ Long, Kimberly, “Luke 17:11-19: Pastoral Perspective.” *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4 (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville: 2010), p. 168 .

⁶ Psalm 66:1-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁷ Buchanan, p. 169.

“Mr. Tuck, you don’t know me, but I sure do know you. You held my hand and walked me to my first day at Fairview Elementary. You didn’t leave me on that day, and I’m not leaving you. We’re going to get through this together.”⁸ Jesus was right, when our lives are filled with gratitude, we are forever changed.

⁸ “Heroes are closer than you might think.” *Charleston City Paper*, March 30, 2022.