

**Sermon**  
**Proper 23, Year C**  
**October 14, 2007**  
*by the Rev. Norman Bray*

We had a vestry meeting this week and like all vestry meetings we began with prayer. At this meeting though, I did something a little bit different and began with a meditation and reflection on today's gospel and I asked the vestry to reflect on what this gospel was saying to them and what this gospel was calling them to do. We had some interesting discussion and insight and near the end of the time that I had set aside I asked if anyone had any last thoughts, and one vestry member said "I'm not sure, but there's probably something in there about stewardship." It is gratifying for a preacher to know that people are listening and understanding the message but, as happy as I am to know that someone is hearing me, I am not going to address stewardship this week. It is obvious by the response to the pledge campaign that you have heard and that you do understand the importance of stewardship and I am heartened and encouraged by your response.

Today's gospel is the story of the 10 lepers. Now we know that does not mean 10 people suffering from Hanson's disease. In fact, in the New Jerusalem bible it reads "10 men suffering from a virulent skin disease." These are persons who must be kept separate from society, they have been shut out, excluded, expelled. This was in the accordance with the Law of Moses', and so you have them approaching Jesus but keeping their distance because they were also keepers of the law. They called out "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." And the gospel says "when he saw them", because seeing them made it obvious what the problem was, they had a skin disease, they were unclean. Jesus says "go, and show yourselves to the priests." Because that is what the Law of Moses commanded, the priests had to certify that they were indeed, no longer unclean and therefore qualified to reenter society. And as they went, they were made clean. Their healing depended not on their faith but rather on their obedience. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests and as soon as they began to do that they were healed. Now, there were 10 of these men and all 10 of them were healed, but one of them "when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice." And after he had praised God, he thanked Jesus. The gospel writer adds, almost as an afterthought, "and he was a Samaritan." This is not an afterthought, this is crucial to the story because the Jews looked down on the Samaritans, they did not worship properly, they were a people that were excluded from Jewish Society. Do you suppose that in this group of 10 men with skin problems that the Samaritan was still set apart? They were united in their disease, and their exclusion from society, their separation from their family, but do you think that they were united in their disease? Could they overlook something as dramatic as being from a country that was vilified by the Jews? I don't think that it is realistic to expect that they could forget their differences even though they were united in their difficulty. That means that as they are hurrying to show themselves to the priests, the only man to turn around and recognize the gift that he had been given was a foreigner. You can hear the sadness in Jesus' voice as he asked "were not 10 made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Jesus' question points at something very important, and that is our need to praise God, our need to give thanks to God for all of the healing, for all of the wonders, for all of the gifts that we receive in our lives. That is what we are doing here today. We gather every Sunday to worship and to give thanks and also to tell God what we think that we need. We do not do this in order to receive anything additional from God; we do it because it is what is right. It is a natural response to our understanding that all that we

have, all that we are, all that we may become, comes from God and that worship and thanksgiving are appropriate responses to all of these gifts. We know that we do not have to give God praise and thanks in order to receive God's gifts. God is faithful and God's gifts are available to all but there is danger to us when we begin to believe that we are owed all of this. That because of our own efforts we should be rewarded with good lives, big houses, nice vacations, and nice cars. The nine men who were healed but did not return to worship God are examples of what happens when we begin to believe that God owes us something. Those nine men saw that they were healed and continued on to show themselves to the priests because they were keepers of the law and they expected that because they kept the law that God would do something for them and then they can return to their families and go back to their normal lives. Only the outsider understood what a wonderful gift he had received and so the outsider returned to praise God and to give thanks to Jesus.

When that outsider returned to praise God and to give thanks for the gift that he had received, he received a greater gift than he ever imagined. A commentary that I read suggested that all 10 men were healed but only one man was saved. That is one way to look at this. Another way to see it is to see that this one man, this foreigner, this outsider, was restored to wholeness, not merely healed. It is this wholeness that we all aspire to. As a people of God we are called to be a healing and praying community, living witness to a life of wholeness, spiritually, physically, mentally, economically, and politically whole. We are called to pray for peace, the earth, the poor, justice, and an end to violence everywhere. We eagerly seek the values of the kingdom of God, the values that Jesus taught. That is why we return here every Sunday and we celebrate this Eucharist, praising God and the thanking Jesus for the gifts, for the life that we have been given. We don't come here out of habit. We don't come here so that our neighbors won't talk about us for sleeping in on Sunday. We come here to be healed, to be restored, to be renewed, to be forgiven, and to be fed. We come here to express our gratitude and that expression of gratitude is also an expression of our faith. Jesus told the Samaritan leper "your faith has made you well" and that is what we seek also.

What we do here on Sunday is important, this is serious, but it is also joyous. That is why we join together in prayer, praising God and thanking God for the wonders that are our lives. That is why at the 10:30 service we lift our voices, making a joyous noise, in songs of praise and thanksgiving. We look to be made whole, to be healed, and we look for the healing of the entire world, for the healing of all creation and for the restoration to wholeness of all God's people. Tell your friends; tell your neighbors what we do here on Sunday. Tell the whole world that we pray for them, we praise God, and that we give thanks for the blessings that we have received that are too numerous to count. Let us be like that Samaritan who could see that he had received a gift greater than anything he deserved. And let us listen, let us listen to hear God say to us "get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."