

THE RESIDUE OF THANKSGIVING**Luke 17:11-19****(Read Luke 17:11-19)**

INTRO: My brother, Kent, and I had a painting business during our college years. We had a weathered '61 Ford Econoline van that we had gussied up with 12 cans of John Deere Green spray paint. The pretty exterior didn't hide that the van had a gajillion miles on it from the previous owner who had been a carpet installer. We had many repeat customers. Some we loved to hear from and others not so much. One of the latter was a very demanding podiatrist who lived nearby. He had exacting standards, which was okay, because we were exacting painters. We painted his office and his home and several properties he owned around the area, so he obviously liked our work, even though he never acted like he liked us much. Right before Kathy and I got married in June of 1980 our favorite foot doctor customer came to us as we finished up a job for him and **told** us we were going to paint his beachfront home at the Jersey Shore. Notice I said **he told us**. He never asked us anything. So, when I replied that with my wedding coming up and with a move from the area to pursue Kathy's schooling in medical technology, and the remaining paint jobs we needed to complete before the move, I really didn't think we could take on a week-long project 100 miles away – even if it was at the shore. I was thinking of the logistics of taking everything we needed for the project and driving the distance in our beater of a van. But he didn't care. His response was "You'll do it." And we grudgingly said okay.

So, after Kathy and I arrived home from our honeymoon, Kent and I packed up all the tools and ladders we'd need for the job, Kathy, who was going to be our cook as we lived in the rental part of the house, and our friend Neil, who we had hired to ensure we got the job done in time; and we headed for South Jersey. A side note is, the van had only two seats which Kent and I occupied. Kathy sat on an upturned five gallon bucket and Neil sat in huge overstuffed chair in the back.

I've already told you we lived in the rental part of the house as we worked there. Our doctor's wife and their two kids lived in the main part of the house. We had never met her – apparently she was always at the beach – maybe because doctor and wife liked it that way – 100 miles apart. I know I'd have wanted that. You already know he was less than pleasant, but in comparison to his wife, he was a sweetheart. She literally never said anything pleasant, certainly to her kids, and even to us. Mrs. Doctor was obviously a very unhappy person.

We worked hard all week, rising with the sun and at work by 6 AM or earlier each day. The work went well and it went fast and we had almost perfect weather, which helped. Kathy would make wonderful meals for us and spent lots of time at the beach. We were able to get to the beach each day by 4 PM as well. It was a dream job, except the customer, Mrs Doctor was obviously difficult to keep satisfied. She second-guessed our work and methodology and was a general wet-blanket. Finally, we were putting the final touches on the project on Thursday afternoon. We had put in four long days and the house looked beautiful. The final job was the deck which had been particularly rough looking, but Kent worked his magic and it was beautiful. As he stood there leaning on his roller extension, I brought Mrs. Doctor to show her the finished product. It looked magnificent and I'm not even bragging – we took pride in our work and it showed. But our sourpuss doctor's wife barely glanced at it, and said, actually, almost huffed, "Well, I guess it looks cleaner at least." For me, it was just more of the same, but for my brother it was the straw that broke the camel's back. That roller extension I just mentioned earlier, came close to being the last thing Mrs. Doctor ever saw. No, he didn't hit her, but the thought more than crossed his mind, and that ungrateful woman has lived on in Tyson Painting lore as vividly now as it did forty years ago.

Ungratefulness is like salt in a wound. Its funny how it persists in our mind. From the crestfallen look of a child whose gift is ignored, to the pain a wife feels when, after slaving over her husband's favorite meal, he criticizes some aspect of it, or worse, never come homes – the absence of thankfulness cuts like a knife.

So, another thing we see as we go with Jesus into his ministry is what he thought about thankfulness or the absence of it. Last week we talked about how Jesus would look to heaven as he was preparing to serve it and break it, whether it was for 5000+ people, or the Last Supper with his disciples, he would look to heaven and thank his Father for it before he did anything else. Thankfulness was a crucial part of Jesus's message and ministry and he expects it in his followers.

We see right away, in the text I read as I began here, that Jesus noticed the ungratefulness of the 9 lepers who did not come back even when they realized their terrible affliction was gone. But he gave high honor and an

added blessing to the one who did return to thank him. Thankfulness is important and it pays extra benefits and that's why I've entitled this talk, THE RESIDUE OF THANKSGIVING. After all...

We don't have to look far to be thankful

- These ten lepers were the personification of outcasts. A diagnosis of leprosy was a death sentence of sorts and sometimes it was mis-diagnosed and any kind of skin condition was liable to be deemed leprous. As a result, lepers had to stay a proscribed distance away from others. They only had other lepers for company. A bad thing about this is a person with acne, definitely not a fatal disease, would live in close proximity with actual lepers and perhaps become infected. A good thing about this was people who would normally not have associated with each other, were no longer concerned about social, racial, and national difference. They were united by their common affliction.
- So, when they cried in a chorus of ten, "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us!*" Luke 17:13b, they were hoping against hope that this man they'd heard about could change their hopeless condition. Verse 12 says "*They stood at a distance*" and cried out to him. His response seems to be immediate, and he tells them to go show themselves to the priests. If you got an all clear from a priest you were healed. In this case it was a mere formality – no priest is needed, Jesus takes care of it right way. Jesus is the healer.
- That's true spiritually too. We don't need a go-between to go to Jesus. All we need to do is what these men called, "*Jesus Master, have pity on me!*" That right there is a reason to be thankful – the middle man is taken out and we can go right to the source for salvation.
- The leper immediately turn and do just as Jesus says. I mean, wouldn't you? Before you'd been hopeless, now here is hope in excess. But before they've gone even a short distance, they realize, as they look at their appendages and at each other, "WE'RE HEALED!!!! WE'RE ALREADY CLEAN!!!!". Now what would you do? Probably we would do what they did – get even faster to the priest! That's the requirement – we need to fulfill the requirement. Thankfulness can come later, right? Well, yes, but thankfulness first is good too. In fact, it's best. Because...

We can have all kinds of virtues, but if we forget thankfulness, we miss out big time

- God notices. In this case, God the Son noticed. "*Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?*" Luke 17:17-18. Where are the other nine? All showed obedience, but only one showed thankfulness. Remember to be thankful.
- And this one who returned was a hated Samaritan. What good came from Samaria? What kind of virtue does a Samaritan have. It was easy for a Jew to look down his nose at a Samaritan and it was easy for a Samaritan to look down his nose at a Jew. Their low opinion of one another was palpable. So Jesus points out that the only one of ten to return to thank him first before going to the priests was a member of a despised race.
- The Samaritan could have felt like chopped liver with Jesus's initial question, "*Where are the other nine?*" Luke 17:27b. But if he did, it didn't last long because Jesus affirmed his faith and added an extra measure to the man's healing. Not only was he healed from a terrible, and most often terminal disease, he was healed spiritually as well. This man would never be the same again. That's the residue of thanksgiving.
- Our text Sharon read earlier in the service is full of that residue. *Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits...* Psalm 103:1-2. **Don't forget his benefits!** And then the Psalmist launches into a long list, that is not exhaustive, for sure, of all the things to be thankful for. They are all the benefits. Noticing what we need to be thankful for is a residue of thanksgiving. Just being mindful of it helps us to never take all our benefits for granted. Never do we blow them off and throw them back in God's face and give him the moral equivalent of, "Well, it looks cleaner, at least."
- The nine lepers who didn't go back to specifically thank Jesus still were healed. They didn't have their healing rescinded because they didn't take the effort the Samaritan did. And I know they were grateful – but their priorities were different from the one who did return to thank Jesus. His priority was to be thankful first – and he enjoyed the residual blessing of it.

Conclusion: This is an opportunity for some self-examination. In fact, it's good that I'm asking us this question when we don't have an annual feast looming on Thursday to distract us. We preach about it every year in November – we need to be thankful all year, not just on Thanksgiving Day. Here is our chance to put our

money where our mouth is on a bleak, midwinter's day. Paul tells us *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. There will be times when it'll be hard to be thankful. In fact, to be thankful in **ALL** circumstances is outright crazy in the eyes of the world – but we don't do things like the world. And this world is not our home, and we take our direction from the one who says, "*Rise and go; your faith has made you well.*" Luke 17:19b. We have been made well, and that's the residue of thanksgiving. Amen.