

**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022.**

**Gratitude – Fullness of Life.**

**Scripture: Luke 17:11-19 and  
Romans 30:20-24**

We have two readings today that could not be more different. The first, from Luke, is about healing and gratitude, or the lack of gratitude that is so often the case. The second reading from Romans, is about condemnation.

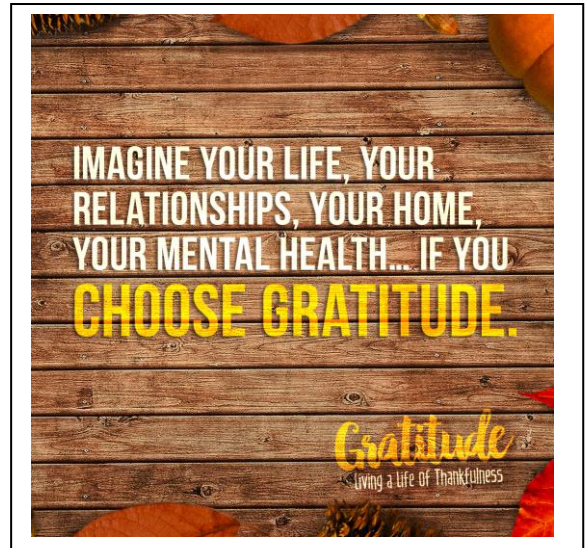
God has condemned those who have rebelled against Him. Given all that God has done for us, that is ingratitude.

Let us go back to the beginning, to Creation. We read in Genesis 1 and 2 about the creation of the world from nothing into a place where people could live in harmony with God. Then God created Adam from the dust of the earth He had created and blessed and He created Eve from Adam's rib.

But there was a weakness in the people He had created. It was a weakness played upon by Satan in the form of a serpent. Perhaps Adam and Eve were grateful for their creation however they wanted more and were tempted.

Result: expulsion from the Garden of Eden and doomed to suffer from all the evils that the world can provide.

But God did not turn His back on His creation. He set in motion a plan to bring people back to Him. That plan was to send us Jesus. We know that God is love, although sometimes it is harsh love but there is also forgiveness when true repentance comes.



Now let us define what gratitude is. When I looked up the word in my Bible I was referred to the entry for thankfulness. The first mention of thankfulness comes in relation to showing thankfulness to God through offering sacrifices to Him. In those days it was about food offerings in the form of sacrificial lambs and grain offerings.

Millenia were still to pass before God provided Jesus, His only Son, to be the sacrificial lamb that gave us salvation.

The raising of sheep to provide the sacrificial lamb and the sowing and reaping of grain took time and effort. What of today when, for most of us, meat and grain come from a supermarket?

For us there is still a sacrifice of time and effort. Do we set aside time each day for prayers?

When we pray do we simply gabble words or do we take time to think about what or whom we are praying for?

Many years ago I attended a funeral in a small country town. It was winter and it was a cold rainy day. The service ended in a burial in the graveyard of the church. There had been a break in the rain but, suddenly, the sky opened up again. The coffin was in the grave by this time. There was one more prayer. I have never heard the Lord's Prayer gabbled so fast.

The priest was in his robes and he had a bald head. I was not in the Church at that time however I felt that it was not very respectful.

Here I will inject a small proviso. Arrow prayers, those spoken about a specific situation of danger or trouble, are not disrespectful.

**Let us now move to the first reading.**

Leprosy was a feared disease in Jesus' time and it still is. In 2019 there were over 200,000 cases of leprosy registered across the world. Of these, 14,893 were children under 14.

There are about 100 known cases in Australia. Today, we are fortunate in that leprosy can be treated medically.

Not so in Jesus' time when the reaction for those diagnosed with the disease was banishment.

**So, now we arrive at the reading.** There were ten lepers. They stood outside a village. They would not be allowed to enter the village. If they tried to enter, they would have been stoned. It was lock out, not lockdown.

Food may have been taken out to them but left at a distance.

Despite their isolation, the lepers must have heard about Jesus. Perhaps family members or others providing food had told them. As the reading says, "They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

**There are a couple of things to note here.**

Firstly, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He was on his way to his death.

Secondly, He was travelling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. The lepers were both Jewish and Samaritans. Disease knows no political boundaries as we know very well with COVID.

Thirdly, the love shown by Jesus, knows no social boundaries. The lepers were social outcasts however Jesus treated them with mercy. However, He did not forget Jewish norms:

– the lepers had to seek the required priestly declaration of health to be accepted back among people. This would have been the requirement for the Samaritans.

Fourthly, it is interesting to note that the lepers called Jesus, Master. This term appears only in Luke.

Fifthly, the lepers asked only for pity and did not specify their request. Jesus knew what they wanted and needed.

God always knows what we want and what we need. They are not always the same. God knows what is best for us. For the lepers it was healing which meant they would no longer be in lock out.

We see in this story that the ten lepers had hope. It may have been a desperate hope. In their minds, perhaps, was the thought – Is it really possible?

Yes, it was.

Luke's ten all showed hope. Hopeless, friendless they may have been but in approaching Jesus they showed that they had not given up hope. They would have heard of the miracles that Jesus was performing and hope burned in their hearts. All were cured.

In the text we see hope fulfilled. Ten lepers hopeful for healing are told to go and show themselves to the priests. What happens next? Nine of the ten disappear from the story. One goes back to Jesus and praises God, throwing himself at Jesus' feet.

Jesus asks after the other nine. He makes a special point about the return of this man. He was a Samaritan, a foreigner from among the people known to the Jews as despised half-breeds and idolaters. It was this man who came back, not those of the same ethnic and religious group as Jesus.

Jesus then says: "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

In returning to give thanks, the Samaritan leper expressed thankfulness. He showed gratitude. Was it at that point He was healed?

A question here?.

Do you like being taken for granted?

If you are like me, and most others, you do not. It is a rare person who accepts being taken for granted.

In this text we see Jesus being taken for granted. He cured ten lepers but only one thanked him.

Here we see Jesus showing that the redemptive touch of God is not limited to the Jewish people but includes Gentiles. The messianic blessings of God are universal, open even to outsiders.

The cured Jewish lepers did not return. Was there an assumption that, as they were God's chosen people, they did not need to show gratitude?

The cured Samaritan fell at Jesus' feet, and that act of submission that signifies reverence, and an acknowledgement of divine authority. This was lacking among the other nine. That this leper came back and acknowledged the help of Jesus meant that not only was he saved from the inevitable death from leprosy. That is, he was physically healed. It meant also that he was spiritually healed. He was made whole physically and spiritually.

**This now comes back to each of us.**

How often do we pray for help and when it is given, how often do we pray with thanksgiving?

Do we forget, in time, who it was who helped us as we get on with life? Is that what happened to the nine who did not returned to give thanks? They got on with their lives, resuming their lives and, in time, they forgot how they were saved? Did they take for granted what was given to them — healing and life.

The question we must all ask ourselves is simple: Do we thank God enough for all he does for us?

It is more than saying thank you in prayer.

It is in what we do for God in our lives.

It is how we live our lives.

It is whether we live in harmony with others, especially within our families.

Recently a cousin of mine died. For at least 10 years he and his only living brother were estranged. I do not believe that either were or are Christians, although they were raised in a Christian household. I have some understanding of why that is so however it is not for sharing here. What is sad is now they can never be reconciled. It is too late.

**The second reading today is about estrangement.** It is about estrangement from God. It is the story of much of the world throughout history and of today. Through the prophets of the Old Testament and through Jesus, God made Himself known to humankind.

Yet His word and God himself have been ignored and people have gone their own ways in their lives. God gave us free will because He wanted humankind to be able to choose. All too often humankind has chosen the dark paths of sin, turning away from the light God offers us. In response God left them to the darkness.

***Yet, as John wrote in his Gospel, 3:16 –***

***For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son,  
that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have  
eternal life.***

The dark paths can end if humankind opens its hearts and minds to Jesus.

Where are our hearts and minds today?

I will end in a prayer. God of mercy, You are full of tenderness and compassion,

slow to anger, rich in mercy, and always ready to forgive:

grant us grace to renounce all evil and cling to Christ,

that in every way we may prove to be your loving children;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God for ever and ever.