

**Set Free and Thankful:**  
**November 15, 2020**

I don't like this gospel lesson. **[1 Lepers]**  
Because I think people want to use this story...  
Like some kind of stick...  
To beat a sense of morality...  
Into us.

The moral is this.  
9 of the healed people...  
Were very, very bad people.

They didn't even bother...  
To say thank you...  
To Jesus.  
For what he had done.

For healing their sick bodies.  
For mending their broken hearts.  
For ending their social isolation.

Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. **[2 Tsk Tsk]**  
Shame on them.  
Those are 9 very selfish...  
Very ungrateful people.

And then...  
There is one shining example...  
Of a Samaritan...  
You know...  
The people who were considered...  
Foreigners...  
Enemies of the Jews...  
Just icky people...  
To begin with.

But this Samaritan is the hero...  
Of this story.  
Because he looks at his body...  
Knows that he has been healed.  
Understands what Jesus has given him.  
So... he falls down...  
At Jesus' feet...  
And says thank you.

So. The lesson is...  
Don't be ungrateful jerks.  
Be thankful like the Samaritan.  
Amen.

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That's not good.  
That's not true.

That explanation...  
Of this particular story...  
does not sit right... with me.

Something at the core...  
Of using this story...  
To make us feel bad...  
So that we become more grateful...

Doesn't seem authentic to me.  
It seems contrary to Jesus.

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But I do think...  
That's why the people who made the lectionary...  
You know... the schedule of bible lessons...  
That we follow every week... every single worship...

I think they chose this particular lesson...  
For Thanksgiving Eve.  
For just that reason.

To make a moral point.  
To make us feel like...  
We should be more thankful.

To make us feel...  
Dare I say it...  
GUILTY.

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But... this is not a story of failure.

This is not a morality parable...  
Of one good person...  
And nine bad people.

This is not a story about someone...  
Forgetting or remembering...  
To say thank you.

This... at it's core... is a story... **[3 Healer]**  
Of the power of JESUS...  
To transform lives.

This is a true story.  
This is a healing story.  
This is a story of 10 people...  
Who had been outcast...  
Because of a terrible disease.

This is about 10 people...  
Who had no other recourse.  
They had no doctor...  
To make them right.

They had no nurse...  
To administer the medicines and the treatments...  
Needed to make them right.

This is about 10 people...  
Who could never go home.  
10 people who could never again...  
Hold their loved one.  
10 people who could never again...  
Step foot near...  
The important people...  
In their lives.

They had no hope.  
They had no opportunity.  
They had no break.  
From being filled with leprosy.

See. This is a story of how Jesus met them.  
Healed them.  
And set them free.

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And I don't think Jesus is really...  
Like our passive aggressive family member...  
Who we see once a year at Christmas...  
And gives us a gift...  
With the expectation...  
To receive a thank you...  
In return.

I don't really think Jesus... **[4 Jesus]**  
Heals people...  
In order to be...  
Thanked.

I think he heals people...  
Because... well... it's what he does.  
It's the nature of his being.  
He is God's healing power...  
He is God's UNCONDITIONAL love...  
That has come into the world...

He said...  
Healing the broken...  
And loving the sinful...  
And taking care of each other...

Are foundational elements...  
Of the kingdom of God...

One time he said...  
"Those who are well have no need of a physician,  
But those who are sick;

I have come to call  
Not the righteous but sinners.”

See... that's why...  
It's hard to reduce this gospel lesson...  
To an issue of morality.

You know...  
Just be good.  
And Jesus will love you.  
More and better.  
Than those other losers.

Bleck. Not true.  
He loved all 10 of those people.  
Because God is love.

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And besides.  
I think it's naive to think...  
That the 9 who didn't come back...  
And fall at his feet...  
And thank him.

Were somehow unappreciative.

It would really hard to believe... **[5 How?]**

That when they got home...  
Or around their family.  
Around their friends.

That someone...  
Didn't immediately ask... **HOW?**

How did this happen?  
How is this possible?  
What changed?  
How can you be standing in front of me...  
Healthy and strong...

And I can't believe...  
The first word...  
Out of their mouth...  
Wasn't...

JESUS.

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Janet and I watched a documentary...  
On Netflix... last week. **[6 Trial 4]**

Called... Trail 4.

It's about this young black man...

Named Sean Ellis...  
Who was accused...  
And tried...  
For killing a Boston police officer.

He served 21 years...  
7 months...  
And 29 days.  
He knew the exact number of days...  
But rounded it up...  
To 22 years.

The first two trials...  
The jury was hung.  
No unanimous decision.  
No guilty conviction.

But the third trial...  
He was convicted...  
And sentenced to life in prison.

But during the course of his incarceration...  
He reached out to a defense attorney...  
Named Rosemary Scapicchio...

And if you don't want to know...  
How this all ended...  
Then pause your tv now.  
This is a spoiler alert!!!

At the conclusion of the documentary...  
The District Attorney's office...  
Due to more evidence...  
And with a hateful reluctance...  
Dismissed the charges.

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But here's the interesting part.  
The day he was set free...  
A reporter asked...  
This man who had been in prison...  
For over half his life.

He asked Sean Ellis...  
What it felt like to be free.

He didn't answer the question asked.  
Instead he turned and gave all thanks...  
To his attorney... Rosemary Scapicchio...  
And to her legal team...  
That worked so hard...  
To set him free.

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See. That's what I'm talking about... **[7 Rejoice]**  
With these people... who had been healed...  
Who had been given back their lives.

When their loved ones...  
Heck... probably when strangers...  
Asked... HOW this could happen?  
How can you be free?

After all those years of sickness...  
And suffering...  
And separation...

I have to believe...  
They pointed to Jesus.

They knew he set them free.

They knew they owed him...  
Their new chance at life.

They knew...  
Who he was...  
And what he did...

THEY WERE THANKFUL.

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But. **[8 Origin Story]**  
This story of Jesus healing...  
The 10 people with leprosy...  
Is not just their story.

It's our story too.

Because... we have the exact same story...  
To explain...  
What we have experienced...  
In the presence of Christ.

If we are honest...  
Each one of us...  
Has an origin story.  
A history.  
A past.

We have a story...  
Of how Jesus met us...  
Somewhere along the way.

And we were broken!

Whether it was...

Physically...  
Or mentally...  
Or spiritually...

We have a story...  
Of that time...  
In our lives...

When we were lost...  
Or hurt...  
Or prideful...  
Or wandering away from God.  
Or full of sin...  
Or making bad choices..  
Or carelessly hurting other people.

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And then...  
At some point...  
Jesus broke into your life...  
Into my life...

And we were set free from something...  
That was holding you back...  
And destroying our lives...

At some point...  
You and I were lepers.

And that was a bad place to be.

MAYBE THAT POINT...  
IS RIGHT NOW.  
For you.

If it is... I'm so sorry.  
But please hear me...  
It is not too late.  
You are not beyond hope...

Jesus wants to set you free.

So... ask him.  
Just call out.  
Just cry to him...  
And he will heal your broken life.

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So tonight... **[9 Living a Thankful Life]**  
Instead of a reprimand to be thankful...

This is an invitation... to join us.  
Join all of us...  
Who were broken...  
But now are healed...

Join us...  
Who fell at Jesus feet...  
Or who ran home...  
To their loved ones.

But either way...  
Join us...  
Broken and healed people...  
In giving thanks and praise to Jesus.

Right now.  
At this very minute.  
Say the name...  
Of the one who set you free.

And be thankful!

Thanks be to God...  
Through our Lord and Savior...  
Jesus the Christ. Amen!