In considering this evening's Gospel reading, we would do well to think about the real meaning of a few words: made clean, healed, thanked, made well. Why those words are important requires some explanation.

Most of us are old enough to remember the howls of outrage among many church folk when new translations of the bible started to appear. All the howls tended to be along the lines of "You can't tamper with the word of God!" As though God himself carefully dictated every word of Holy Scripture in flawless early 17th century English and dedicated the effort to King James the VI and I. As we attempt to understand scripture, it is important to remember that not one word of the original Bible was written in English; indeed there was no English at the time. The early books of Hebrew Scripture were written in Hebrew and some later books were written in Aramaic a closely related language. The first major translation was into Greek in Alexandria between the 3rd and first centuries before the common era. Because it was reputed to be the work of 70 scholars, it carries the Latin name the Septuagint. The entire body of the Christian scriptures was written in Greek, the lingua franca of the Eastern Mediterranean and near east from the 4th century before the common era in the time of Alexander the Great until well into the common era.

Why is this important? Because, sometimes, much can be lost in translation, and much can be distorted because languages are not neutral media. They reflect much about the culture and the world view of the societies from which they have emerged. And let it be said, the biases of the translator are also a factor.

Translators do their best, but they too are creatures of their own language, culture, and experience. That is why Biblical translations are always the work of expert committees. Like the 70 for the Septuagint, 47 scholars completed the King James version; 30 scholars under the leadership of their chair, Bruce Metzger produced the New Revised Standard Version, and more than 50 scholars participated in the recent updated version of the NRSV, the version we use in this service.

Now let me turn to the reading. Jesus was on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem for the last time. He well knows that the end of his earthly ministry is coming close. To get to Jerusalem from Galilee, most Galilean Jews, elected to either cross the Jordan just south of the Sea of Galilee and then cross back at Jericho and then make the long climb to Jerusalem an ascent of well over 3000 feet. Others elected to go down to the coastal plain and travel up to Jerusalem. This was the longest route. The coastal route and the Jordan route allowed the pilgrim to avoid Samaria and all the tensions that existed between Jews and their despised neighbours, the Samaritans. Jesus, the redeemer of outcasts and sinners, elected to take the shortest and most direct route which goes right through Samaria.

In our passage, Jesus has passed through Samaria and is in the borderlands, the Valley of Jezreel, when he encounters the 10 lepers. Luke is emphasizing that Jesus frequently exists and interacts with people in the physical, social, and spiritual borderlands. Places and social situations in which the religious authorities would not have been seen dead. The fact that the only one of the cured who returned to give thanks is a despised

Samaritan is illustrative of Jesus' ministry on the margin and his commitment to be there for the lost.

The lepers keep their distance as the law required, and our passage does not suggest Jesus knew there was a Samaritan in their midst before the Samaritan returned to give thanks. Jesus tells them to show themselves to the priests which was the requirement for a leper to be pronounced no longer diseased. *As they went they were made clean*. The Greek word in the original text for clean is *katharizō*. It is the root of the English word catharsis. In this case, it refers to the social healing that enables them to return to society from which they were banished because of their disease. Then we read: *Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed*. It is worthy of note that the text doesn't read when he saw that he was made clean. Our text says *he was healed*. The Greek word in the original is not *katharizō; it* is *iaomai* which refers to the clinical cure of the leprosy. After he had prostrated himself at Jesus' feet, Jesus tells him that *your faith has made you well*. The word in the original for well is *zōzo*. The difference between the 9 who did not return to give thanks and the Samaritan who did is profound. The 9 are clean of leprosy both the words *katharizō* and *iaomai* apply to them, but *zōzo* only applies to the Samaritan. What does *zōzo* mean that *katharizō* and *iaomai* do not? *Zōzo* has a holistic meaning — combining physical healing, social restoration, and spiritual salvation into a single act of complete renewal. I checked in three other translations of the bible that I had at home how *Zōzo* was rendered. In the Revised Standard and in the French Bible from the Société Biblique de Genève "saved" "*t'a sauvé*" or from

the King James, "made whole" were the translators' choices. I think I like "made whole" best.

What caused the unlikely Samaritan to be the one who is holistically healed – socially, physically, and spiritually? His gratitude. His thankfulness was not a, "ta very much", and on his way," kind of gratitude, He prostrated himself before Jesus and thanked him. The Greek word which is translated "thanked" is *eucharistōn*. *Eucharistoη* expresses a foundational posture of the soul toward God. It shifts the focus from human lack to divine abundance. The root of the word combines *Charis,* grace; *Chara,* Joy; and *Eucharistia,* thanksgiving. God's grace flows unearned into the world; when we receive the grace our response is deep thanksgiving; when true thanksgiving occurs in recognition of the flow of grace, spiritual joy is complete. You will doubtless recognize that *Eucharistia* is the root word of our most holy sacrament, the Eucharist. Yes, Jesus cured his leprosy which allowed him to rejoin society, but more importantly Jesus opened his salvation to him. The 9 had the opportunity but lacked the gratitude to effect the transformation.

At this point in these weekly homilies, I usually say what does it mean to us? Well I think we would do well to reflect on the quality of our thanksgiving. The message comes through clearly from our passage; without gratitude, we cannot be whole. I would go so far as to say that the opposite of gratitude is bondage. Bondage to a scheming for more. Bondage to narcissistic blindness and lack of compassion for those who have less. Bondage to envy of those who have more. We also

need to be clear that gratitude is not a passive emotion; it requires an active response. Prayers of thankfulness are good, but acts motivated by gratitude are essential. Can we even dimly reflect the limitless flow of grace from God to those around us in our community and in our world? For to do so is what it is to be whole in God.

Thanks be to God, Amen