

And One Came Back

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, October 9th, 2022 - Luke 17:11-19)

When I worked at Baptcare, each year at Christmas I would organise for donations to make up hampers for our clients who were either financially disadvantaged or alone at that time of the year. The case managers or I would then deliver them. One year a hamper was delivered to a Chinese family who had come here to be with their daughter, but from whom they had become estranged, they had absolutely nothing. The case manager handed the hamper to them, and they were overwhelmed. The wife ran to the kitchen and grabbed a peach from the fruit bowl and handed it to the case manager and in broken English insist she take it with her. Such was this woman's need to say thank you.

In this last year when we were working with those using the Orange Sky's services, one night after everyone else had left, one young man came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder and said thank you. Another woman we met at that time now comes along to our craft group and brings food to share – croissants, or on her birthday chocolates.

Sometimes the thank you's come from those you least expect it.

Why is it so hard to say thank you? Maybe we think we deserve what has happened. Maybe we don't have the courage to say thank you or the words to express our thanks. Maybe we are unable to make ourselves vulnerable.

Why is so hard to accept thanks? Maybe we don't think we deserve it? Maybe we don't like the fuss.

In our story today we find ten men who have contracted a nasty disease that seems to be contagious and causes them to live on the outskirts of town, to live on the margins. They were considered 'untouchable' and unclean. They could not re-enter society without being cured of the disease and it was the role of the priests to check their symptoms and give the all clear for them to re-enter society.

They are living on a border, the border between Galilee and Samaria. Now we know from other stories in Luke's gospel that the Samaritans are a hated race, seen as traitors and the enemy.

Jesus passes by this group, and they kept their distance but ask him for healing. With a word Jesus sends them off to the priest (remember the one who could pronounce the all clear) and on the way they are healed. No doubt they were overjoyed and returned to their old lives. But one comes back. One comes back to say thank you.

All ten of the lepers do as Jesus has asked, and we presume they are all healed. Why do the nine not come back? Is it because they are ungrateful or are they just getting back to their life now they are well. Perhaps they seek Jesus out another time to express their thanks. Perhaps they pay it forward and help somebody else?

To leave this story as a moral tale about saying thank you is to do a disservice and miss the most radical part of the story.

What did you notice about the one who returns to say thank you?

We learn a lot about the one who comes back. We learn he is a Samaritan. This man had been more stigmatized than the others, not only did he have leprosy and was untouchable, but he was a Samaritan to boot. Whilst the other nine who were healed could easily be reintegrated into society it would not be so easy for this man, he would remain an outsider.

He is like Naaman in the Hebrew Bible, another foreigner healed from leprosy.

The man in our story today takes a chance and comes back to say thank you, but more than that he comes back shouting praises and bowing down before Jesus and thanks him.

Do you remember the story of the **Good Samaritan**, he is used by Jesus as the best example of loving your neighbour, the best example of crossing boundaries and showing compassion. In this story the **grateful Samaritan** is the only one to return and say thank you, the only one to return and thank God. In Luke's gospel it is the foreigners that show us how to love God and love neighbour.

When he returns to offer thanks to Jesus, it is as though he gets another blessing. Not only is he healed from his physical disease, but Jesus says his faith has made him well, his faith has made him whole or in more religious language his faith has saved him, has led to his salvation.

This is the radical nature of the story, that the 'foreigner' has received both physical healing and spiritual healing if you like. Luke is constantly telling us that God and Jesus has come to save more than just the people of Israel, but the entire world, the Gentiles. God's love is not exclusive, it is inclusive.

Sometimes the thank you's come from those you least expect.

This story on one level is about being grateful. On a deeper level it is about inclusivity and breaking down barriers.

We have 'Samaritans' in our society don't we? Maybe it is the homeless or the asylum seeker or the drug addict or the person from another religion. This story is a reminder to us that God has come for all, that these people might just be the ones who reveal something of God's love and the right response to God's kindness to us, indeed they might just be examples of faith for us. We need to break down our own prejudices and be the inclusive love that God calls us to be. Like Jesus we must transcend the boundaries and margins in our world and offer compassion to all.

Maybe saying thank you brings yet more blessing. Maybe gratitude begets gratitude.