

Our first reading is from first.

Timothy you could be seated one through 13.

And then, my son, be strong in the grace that is Jesus Christ. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses in rust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others, join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please the commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of props. Reflect on what I'm saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all of this. Remember Jesus Christ. Raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being changed like a criminal. But God's word is not changed. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain a salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy saying if we died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him.

If we disown Him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown Himself. This is the word of the Lord. Please stand for a Gospel reading. This is Luke 16:17, verses eleven through 19. Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him, and they stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us. And when he saw them, he said, Go, show yourselves to the priest. And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked Him, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, we're not all ten cleaned cleansed. Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? And then he said to him, Rise and go. Your faith has made you well. This is the word of the Lord.

Well, Father, we are so grateful for this day. There are so many things to be thankful for, Lord, for our health, for the ability to gather and worship, for the Gospel, for one another, for this day. We ask, Lord, that you would pull back the veil, for our eyes are often clouded. We often don't see well, we don't hear well. Our hearts are often hardened. We ask that you would soften them today by Your Holy Spirit, that you would awaken us new faith. And we would see clearly that through the preaching of Your Word, the truth of Your word would find its way into our hearts in deeper ways. And so we offer ourselves to you, Lord, in Jesus name, amen. So we are in Luke 17, this account of ten lepers who are healed. Can anyone guess what the main word that describes this account is? It's always a dangerous thing to ask because nobody wants to get it wrong, right? I'll give you a hint. Whenever you're in doubt, just say Jesus. Right? Although that's not right, I think any of us can see this account is about thankfulness. It's about thankfulness. And the funny thing about thankfulness is that you don't have to be a Christian to know that you should be more thankful.

Some of the most heartened atheists find themselves in moments, inexplicably giving thanks to what they do not know, but yet feeling gratitude and knowing that probably their lives ought to dwell there a little more often. They ought to be a more thankful people. So if you talk to just about anybody and ask them if they're thankful enough, it would probably be a good conversation. They would probably agree with you. Yeah, being a thankful person is a good thing. But especially we as Christians know, right? We know that we should be thankful above all people. And yet, if I were to ask you, Are you thankful enough? My guess is probably 99.9% of you would say, no, I really am not. I'm not thankful enough. I know that I would say the same thing. So what do we do to get more thankful? I'm sure you've thought about that before. You've thought about the reasons for thankfulness. And we preach these reasons to ourselves and to our children, right? We want our children to be thankful. Is that right, Sophia? Yeah. Your parents want you to say thanks. Addie, do your parents ever say thank you?

That's right. They want you to say thank you. And here's what we do to get ourselves to be more thankful. We think of the reasons to be thankful, and there's a bunch of reasons. There's the it could be worse reason. Dr. Seuss grasped the spirit of this when he said you ought to be thankful a whole heaping lot for the places and people. You're lucky you're not. I don't know if this ever happened to

you when you were a kid, but did you ever have something served to you at dinner and you did not want to eat it and you were not in the least thankful for it? And your parent or some stern adult said to you, you should be thankful. Think of all the starving children in China. That was it when I was little. But who knows what it is now in Ethiopia or wherever it might be. It could be worse. That's a reason to be thankful. We tell ourselves and we tell our children. We also do this one. Sophie and Addy tell me if this sounds right. It's the right thing to do. Right? Your parents tell you you need to give thanks because it's the right thing to do.

And you are not going to play that video game that your uncle and your auntie gave you until you sit down and write them a proper thank you card. Why? Because it's the right thing to do. And we tell ourselves that as well. I should be a more thankful person. It's the right thing to do. I got to tell you, as a pastor, I have many occasions to write thank you notes. I hate writing thank you notes. I don't know why I hate it. And yet I know, by golly, it's the right thing to do. The right thing to do. Reason is it enough motivation. It makes you a better person. Reason. Now, this quote comes from Nick Mutovic. I can't even say his name, but he's an Australian guy with a Czechoslovakian name. Crazy world we live in. But he said this, and here's the thing about him. He was born without any arms, without any legs. And all throughout his life, though he was sad about that and asked God about that, he determined his life was going to mean something. And his life is given to God, and he travels all over the world inspiring people to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

And he said, I never met a bitter person. I never met a bitter person who was thankful or a thankful person who was bitter. Being thankful makes you a better person. And that's a good reason, right? And we speak that reason to ourselves. I want to be a better person. Being thankful makes me a better person, not a bitter person. I want to be bitter, not better. I want to be better, not bitter. Sometimes I want to be bitter and not better. But in my saner moments, I want to be a better person. And that's a reason we speak to ourselves. But if that's not enough, it lifts your spirits. Reason. And for this, we turn to the great scholar and theologian Willie Nelson, who said, when I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around. It's true. You want to lift your spirits. Give thanks. Look at the things you have, not the things you don't, and give thanks and your spirit will be lifted. Now, if all those reasons are not enough, there's the ace in the hole. There's. The God commands it. Reason. Be thankful. Give thanks in all things. In all things.

By prayer and petition with thanksgiving, there's a command. There's an instruction from our Lord to be a thankful people. Rejoice in the Lord. I'll say it again. Rejoice always and give thanks. We all know it right. We should be thankful. We should be thankful. And yet and yet, I got to tell you, I usually wake up every morning. I wish I woke up saying, good morning, Lord. But too many mornings I wake up saying, Good Lord, it's morning and I kid you not. I usually don't say that, but I kid you not. Here's what I do say. Often when I'm kind of stumbling from my bed towards the coffee, I say, Help me. Help me, Jesus. I can't believe another day has started and I'm not ready to get out of bed. Help me. I wish I was a more thankful person. I wish it was the first reflex of my morning. And my guess is that most of you wish the same thing. So how do we actually get there? Well, as we look at this account, we find out what motivated the Samaritan. Leper may actually move us deeper than the reasons we've just looked at, may actually give us greater rationale, greater resource, greater internal and intrinsic motivation to be, of all people, the happiest and most thankful of people.

We see how the account begins in verse eleven. In verse eleven it says now, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. It begins with grace because most Jews did everything they could to avoid Samaria, to go the long way around it. But not Jesus. He would go through it. He would go right up to it. He had no problem. And he's not shying away from Samaria or this Jewish border town. Now, here's the background. Samaritans were viewed by the Jews as despicable, as lowlife, as traders, impure, half breeds heretical. And there was good reason to feel that in many, many ways throughout their history. But the resentments ran both ways for the ways the Jews treated the Samaritans, often who are less than kind and often were violent in many ways. So here we are in a border town, and we know what border towns are like when there are hostilities between races, those racial prejudices and tensions can lead to incursions and incidents. And my guess is that that was the case on this border town. That more than one person could speak about being spit at by Samaritans, more than others could tell of how they clocked a Samaritan with a

rock or an apple, of how they had returned in kind, how the bruises they had.

You could say, well, you should see the other guy, right? But Jesus comes right up to a town like that out of sheer grace, and what does he encounter there? Before he enters into the town, he encounters ten lepers. Those lepers would not be allowed in the town. Skin diseases of those days were often considered about the worst fate that could happen to you. Leviticus, chapter 13, devotes a whole chapter 59, verses two rules about how you are to treat leprosy and how you are to treat the leper. In verse 45 of Leviticus 13, it says now the leper on whom the sword is his clothes shall be torn and his head bare, and he shall cover his moustache. That means he has to have a mask over his mouth and he shall cry, Unclean. Unclean. Girls, can you imagine that if you had to cry out, Unclean, unclean. And everybody would run from you? You'd have no friends because nobody would want to touch you. Nobody would want to be unclean. He shall be unclean all the days he has, the sore. He shall be unclean. He is unclean. You hear how many times it says unclean?

As if to make the point? And he shall dwell alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp. And in this case, all of them are considered incurable. Because Leviticus 13 actually goes through a 14 day process before you're actually completely removed from town. You have to separate yourself during those 14 days. But the first seven is a chance for you to be treated and for the skin disease to go away and the priest inspects you. And if it hasn't gone away, there's another seven days. There's this hope that you'll be able to be readmitted into the life of the community. So pretty much if you go through 14 days where whatever you have doesn't clear up, you're starting to feel hopeless and believing that you are incurable and you're absolutely unclean. And so there's nine Jews and one Samaritan. Apparently misery loves company. Apparently the thing that can bring Jews and Samaritans together is being similarly outcast. And so it's a low place, I imagine, for those Jews to be and maybe for that Samaritan to be but to at least know that they've got the company of one another. And in verses 13 and 14, it says that as Jesus was going into the village, they met him at a distance.

At a distance. They called out in a loud voice Jesus, Master, have pity on us. And he does. It says, when he saw them, he said, Go show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. Jesus has mercy. Not swayed by the tribalism or the nationalism or the cleanliness laws of his nation. You know Fanny Crosby in order to kind of understand something of Jesus compassion. Fanny Crosby was a Baptist hymn writer who wrote well over 1000 hymns. And the reason she was so prolific is that at about six months, she had an eye infection and their normal doctor was out of town. So the doctor that came to treat her told the parents to put a mustard poultice on her eyes. And that mustard poultice, most believe, now caused her to become permanently blind. And she praised God for her blindness because it led her to see deeper things and truer things to become a musician and to write of the mercies and the glory and the grace of God. And she knew it so deeply and felt it so keenly that she gave her life not only to him writing, but to the service of the poor.

Sought to live among the urban poor in New York City spent most of her salary giving to the poor and seeking to the poor's needs. And when she would go to serve in the soup kitchen as a blind person, she developed a keen sense of smell. And she would sniff out the smelliest person in the soup kitchen, and she would go and sit right by that person and share the gospel with them, because she knew that that person, even among the outcasts and the homeless, was probably the most avoided of all people by those who were serving and maybe by their fellow outcasts because of how bad they smell. Why did she do it? The mercy of Jesus. That's what Jesus mercy is like, and that's what Jesus mercy produces in those who receive his mercy. She wrote in one of her hymns, rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin in the grave weep or the ailing one, lift up the fall and tell them of Jesus mighty to save God. I want to have a spirit like that. I know I'm far from it. I would love for our church to have a spirit like that for the loss and the broken and the poor amongst us.

So Jesus approaches these men in pity, but he tells them to, go show yourselves to the priest. He doesn't do what we've seen him do at other times, touch them or anything. He says, Go show yourselves to the priest. Because he knows that what needs to happen for them to reenter the life of the community is the priest has to declare them clean. It's not enough for them simply to say, I'm clean, I'm clean. They got to go to the priest. And so he says, go show yourselves to the priest. And in their act of obedience and faith on their way, they are healed. Now, here's something about the priest.

I think it must have been hard. It must have been hard for the local priest. Maybe not all because some maybe were inwardly hardhearted, but you've got to assume that at least some of them cared about their community. And they've seen families come to synagogue and grow together. They've seen a young person rise up and then a skin infection, and they know that they've ultimately got to make the pronouncement. That means that young person can no longer live with their family.

They can no longer live in the community. It must have been a hard thing. But conversely, what a joy, what a blessing Jesus gave to that priest that he could see nine people of his community restored to life in the community. And he could be the one, as priests, to declare them clean, to give the whole community confidence that they can enter in and you will not be infected. That according to the law, according to my training, they are clean like it never happened. What a blessing. I imagine Jesus was thinking about that as well in his love and his mercy. And that's a side point. I don't know. But in verses 15 through 18, we come to the heart of the story. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked him. And his Lord emphasized, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, we're not all ten cleansed. Who's he asking? I imagine his disciples and perhaps some of the townspeople there who did not really like Samaritans, were not all ten cleansed. Where are the other nine?

Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? I doubt Jesus even thought of him as a foreigner wants to underscore it with his people, with this foreigner. So what made him come back and not them? Why didn't they come back? Well, I imagine it's something like this, and I don't know if this has ever happened in your house, but sometimes at Christmas, all the toys are being unwrapped and you get to the last one and one of the kids says, is that it? You're like, what? You know how much all those gifts cost? Do you know how much we went out of our way to get we had to fight somebody for that. Tickle Me Elmo. Do you know how hard it was to make sure you had the best Christmas ever? And you're saying that's is that it? Where's the thanks? Right? Well, what's going on with those kids? I think it's the same thing that's going on with those lepers. Wow, I'm clean. I can't wait to get back to life. I can't wait to hug my family. I can't wait to be declared clean to the whole community.

I can't wait to get back to work. I can't wait. I'm moving on, forgetting what's behind. I'm straining towards what's ahead when they forget that what's behind is Jesus, who healed them, Jesus, who has given everything for them, who's given up his home, who's walking long and hard miles. He's sleeping out in open fields so that they might be cleansed, they might be healed, they might have the good news proclaimed to them. I can't wait to get by. Golly, I hate it when I hear I'm not complaining because this has not happened here, but I know of ministers who say they get chewed out for preaching too long because they gotta get to the restaurant before the Baptist do. You know, we do the same thing. My goodness. So what made the one come back, the Samaritan, I wonder? Did he remember? I've always been taught it's the right thing to do. I'm going back there. Or, you know, giving thanks really makes me a better person. So I'm going to go thank him first and then I'll get back to life. Or, you know, I just feel better when I give thanks. I'm going to go give thanks to Jesus because, by golly, it makes me feel better.

I think somewhere I read in the law to give thanks. We're commanded to do it. So I don't think any of those things were in his mind to you. All that I can say, maybe all that we can say is he didn't miss the moment. As I was preparing this, the commentary that I looked at, Darryl Bach, the writer, said, the other nine missed the moment. They missed the moment. But this guy recognizes that something holy has taken place and he's got to give praise, he's got to give thanks, and he comes praising God. He doesn't know Jesus is God. He's praising God with a loud voice. We ought to rejoice when people are in church, worshiping with all their hearts, with everything within them, praising God with a loud voice. He comes and he sees the one through whom God has worked as is Jesus. Whoever he is, we know he can heal. Perhaps a prophet, perhaps what? I don't know. But I've got to thank him. He doesn't miss the moment. And here's the thing. He called out to Jesus from a distance, but now he comes right up to Jesus and you know, that's what it's all about.

When a holy moment happens, what do you do? You stop. If you don't miss it, you stop. You turn. You give praise to God. That's repentance. Turning from what? Turning from what we all do. Pursuing our life as we see best, right? Pursuing what the next thing is, thinking about the next thing all the time,

our minds distracted, diffused, going on to the next thing. You know, the number one enemy of thankfulness is, hurry, it's moving on to the next thing. I've got to keep moving, got to keep getting instead of stopping and seeing God in the moment. I wonder how many moments we miss I wonder how many moments we missed this week where God was doing something and we didn't see it. But when we do, we turn, we come, we worship and we give thanks. We savor the joy of our salvation. That's what church is about. I can't understand why we can be so Lacey Fair about church. I don't know if I'm going to go this Sunday. Do you know what you're missing? The moment. He's here. He's in the bread and the wine, he's in the people, he's in the children, he's in the gathering in a way that he is not.

When we're not, he's here. And what happens when we gather and we capture the moment and we savor the moment? We start to recognize those moments in life as we move throughout our week and we come more and more truly and deeply thankful. So I would commend to you all the reasons for thankfulness. You know, it does make you a better person. It is the right thing to do. God does command it. Things could be worse, right? I commend all those reasons to you. But there is no reason like this one, for in it we encounter Jesus and we know Him and he knows us. That's why Jesus says to Him he's so interesting in verse 19 then he said to him, rise and go, your faith has made you well. Wait, no, Jesus, you made him well. You healed him. That's not what Jesus is talking about. Rise and go. Your faith has made you well. The Greek word there is so so it's sometimes translated rightly. So your faith has saved you so. So is the same word for salvation as it is for healing. Your faith has made you well. It's made you whole.

What did Jesus come to give us, folks? Life and life to the full. And when we don't miss the moment right, our faith saves us. It makes us whole. And Jesus says, I don't want you to miss that. There will come a day when Jesus will say to some, depart from me, I never knew you, see? But Lord, we walked with you. Lord, you healed me of a disease. Lord, you were in our streets. I never knew you. Lord, I was one of the ten lepers that you healed. I never knew you. But that one who didn't miss a moment, I know Him and he knows me. That's what the Lord holds out to you today that you and I might be more and more fully saved, more fully made whole, might capture the moments each and every day might find ourselves praising God for the little things, for the big things, might have horrible things happen to us and realize that by the grace of God it didn't happen before. And God is with me and we'll get through it. In fact, he's right here in the suffering, right here with me. So I praise You, God, even in the midst of the valley that Jesus holds that out to us.

May we all receive it. And as a priest, it is my joy when we speak the confession to proclaim you are clean. Amen.