

THANKS FOR GIVING
2 Corinthians 9:6-15 & Luke 17:11-19

The lepers Jesus heals in our gospel lesson weren't always lepers. One of them might have been a carpenter, building homes and workplaces in his community. One of them may have been a fisherman, working hard day after day to provide food for his neighbors. In a better time, one of them could have been a teacher, another a farmer, another a priest. At one time, the leper from Samaria might have been a physician, with people coming to him every day for healing and health. But now, no one even cared to learn his name. The crowds avoided him. He had contracted leprosy, a dreaded and deadly skin disease. You might say that what he had put others at DISEASE... you see the hands that had once been instruments of healing had become withered extremities that would inflict disease if he were to touch the skin of another. He may have once been a physician, but now he was just one of those dirty lepers that lived outside the city walls.

So a group of ten lepers came together and formed a small community outside of Galilee. During the day, they cooked together, ate together and stood near the city gate to beg together. Whenever anyone would approach the city, they would place their vessels in the path of the travelers, distance themselves and cry out, "Have mercy on us! Have mercy on us!" And then they would watch and hope that a good-hearted soul would drop a denarius or shekel or even a mite into their cup.

One day, as Jesus approached Galilee, the infected group placed their vessels in his path. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," they called. But

instead of dropping a coin in their cup, Jesus offered them a relationship with him by speaking to them saying, “Go show yourselves to the priests”. Without any hesitation, they listened and that small group of lepers began walking toward the temple. And on their way, they were healed. As they walked, they were transformed from a small leprous community to a group of healthy men. You might say that no longer were others at DIS-EASE with them. And when one of them, a Samaritan, saw that the sores on his skin had disappeared, HIS EYES OF FAITH WERE OPENED. He knew that God had healed him and given him new life. And that spark of faith empowered the Samaritan to return to Jesus to give THANKS FOR GIVING. With a loud voice he praised God, fell down at Jesus’ feet, and thanked God for the gift of healing. The Samaritan recognized the greatest blessing of all: He saw God actively at work in his life. His life was no longer defined by his disease.

Jesus said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” Having received the gift of health and healing, the Samaritan physician could again go out and give the gift of healing to others. As he gave thanks, he was empowered to proclaim that the gift of health ultimately and always comes from God. In other words, in all of life, he acknowledged God.

This morning we have dedicated our new Rogers organ in order to make music for the glory of God, our pledges or monies we each have promised to give the church in 2012 to spread God’s Word and food bags so that others in our community may be fed with the Word of God. We indeed, have much to be thankful for! This past year, by working together,

we have accomplished more than originally anticipated. Our building has received much needed repair and care. Our existing ministries have not only been revitalized, but new ministries have started. Last, but not least, we are working with our neighbors in sharing God's love.

Our Thanksgiving Plus food bag ministry saw many of God's children working together. The vision of feeding others came from our own Cyndi Stonebraker who also is assistant manager at Family Video. Family Video provided the turkeys for the food bags and offered the community an opportunity to provide food items. We at St. James also offered food items to contribute to this ministry. Falls Youth Service, our new youth group here at St. James, worked with members of our congregation this past week to fill the bags for distribution. And last but not least, JoAnne Lorenzo of Niagara Falls Magdalene Ministries, identified and brought awareness to the need within our community. This morning I want to thank JoAnne for giving us the opportunity to serve and be in ministry with others. I have asked her to speak to us about Magdalene Ministries so that we may get to know and be aware of the needs of others.

These individuals that we share with at Thanksgiving could be anyone of us. Who knows what a day will bring? There was an urban ministry group that was asked why they took such a risk of faith to reach out to people at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. Many who volunteer in those ministries simply reply that they feel it's the least they can do in light of all God's blessings which they enjoy. In other words, they are grateful. Gratitude motivates them and enables them to be beacons of hope to those without hope.

DT Niles, the Indian theologian, once defined evangelism or God talk as “one hungry beggar telling another hungry beggar where to find bread.” When we are grateful enough for the bread that we have received that we are willing to reach out to the lost and hurting and lonely and excluded ones around us, it is then that we discover that we ourselves are being saved and we say THANKS FOR GIVING! Amen.