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2 Kings 5.1-3,7-15c

Ps 111

2 Tim.2.8-15

Luke 17.11-19

Then Jesus asked: 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?' Lk 17.17

What makes you shout for joy, or want to fall at someone's feet in gratitude?

I imagine it's not actually difficult to come up with some answers?

- For example, the person who comes to your door to tell you that you have won one million pounds in the lottery. You will shout and jump for joy ...maybe not fall at their feet, but possibly give them a hug.
- Or, someone who has been looking for work for a year, and finds the job that matches their skills and has a decent pay package attached. You may not feel able to shout for joy in front of the person who offers you the job, but you may feel like falling at their feet.
- Or the news that a loved one who is fighting a life-threatening disease has turned a corner and is going to be cured. Again, you will want to hug the consultant who gives you the news.

And as religious people, we may indeed show our gratitude in a more lasting way and decide to give ten % of our lottery win, £100 000 to various charities.

Or we wake up every morning thanking God that we can go to work;

Or we frequently stop in Church and light a candle to say thank you for the loved one who is cured.

But will we? Or will our sense of gratitude dissipate quickly as life throws new challenges at us?

Thinking about this morning's gospel story, one which most of us are very familiar with, I do wonder whose behaviour is actually more surprising – that of the one leper who turns back, or the nine who do as they were told.

After all, if we listen carefully to the story from Luke's gospel, Jesus responds to the request of the ten lepers, 'Master, have mercy on us' by telling them 'Go and show yourselves to the priests'. And it's while they are on their way to the priest that their leprosy clears up and they are healed.

We think that the nine who didn't turn round were Jews, who knew that they needed to be pronounced clean by the local priest before they could think of themselves as being healed. So, who can blame them, that they were longing to hear the priest's words, confirming their healing rather than go back to Jesus first.

But then, why did they not go back? We don't know. We can only speculate...and we can understand that they wanted to go and see their families and friends and share their news with them. And they probably praised God then, but, did they wonder who the man was who had healed them? Did they think of going to thank him? By this stage in his ministry Jesus was already very unpopular and black-marked by the religious authorities. So, perhaps, it wasn't such a good thing after all to be seen with him....And yet, he had healed them.

This leaves the tenth leper- who did turn round on the road; who felt deep gratitude; in fact he was a Samaritan, which makes him a foreigner, an outsider who was only mixing with Jewish people because they all had to live as outcasts, on the edge of society due to their leprosy.

So, when together with the others he sees Jesus approaching he joins in with the shouting ' Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'. And he sets off with the other nine to find the local priest – until he realises his skin is clear; the sick flesh and disfiguring patches are gone. He stops in his tracks and realises that the most amazing thing has happened. And he praises God with a loud voice-my guess is he is also jumping up and down – probably all very undignified and embarrassing to any onlookers – and runs back to Jesus and falls at his feet, thanking him. And Jesus affirms him saying ' Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well. I think this man loved Jesus for the rest of his life.

He had not only been cured from his skin disease, but he has been made well, whole, given life, saved. It turns out – that whilst it is wonderful that his skin is now clean, his real gain is him being able to see and perceive at a deeper level what has happened and who Jesus is.

And so, perhaps faith is not so much a matter of believing only, but of seeing and recognising and acknowledging the gift that life is.

All the lepers were healed; one, however, saw, noticed, let what happened sink in...and it made all the difference.

*Because he *saw* what happened, he *recognized Jesus*, his reign and his power.

*Because he *saw* what happened, he *had something for which to be thankful*, praising God with a loud voice.

*Because he *saw* what happened, he *changed direction*, veering from his course to find a priest to first return to Jesus.

Perhaps this story is a reminder for all of us to recognize that what we *see* makes all the difference. And is what we see that life is gift?

In the face of adversity, do we see danger or opportunity? In the face of human need, do we see demand or gift? In the face of the stranger, do we see potential enemy or friend? In the complexity of life, do we see what is good or all that feels wrong?

This story invites us to say 'Thank You', but in a deep and lasting way. It invites us to open our hearts and minds, to recognise God at work and to be thankful for life and all the goodness around us. Last week we celebrated Harvest and were reminded by St. Paul to always rejoice and give thanks to God. As the nine lepers show, this is not our natural disposition. Our asking and thanking can be quite out of balance.

But being thankful is an attitude we can cultivate – the old spiritual discipline of counting our blessings, every day helps with this.

What makes you shout for joy, or want to fall at someone's feet in gratitude?

I'm sure the examples I quoted at the start will still stand, but we may also just rejoice in the fact that Jesus offers us, too, wholeness and life, no matter what our circumstance, and, that we are here to share in the Eucharistic meal and live as people who know God's generous love and presence with us. Amen.