***Sermon***
***Where are the Other Nine?***

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
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In our Gospel from Luke, we encounter Jesus again healing but this time he is healing a large group of people who are suffering, we are told, from a skin disease. Now one of my guilty pleasures is to watch medical reality shows and I love the ones focused on dermatologic conditions – I find them fascinating. You see all sorts of things like fairly common, benign conditions that are hardly noticeable to some that are very debilitating and life altering. In some cases, these conditions cause the person to be quite isolated and misunderstood because of how altered their appearance becomes. And in today's story, those suffering in this condition are just that. They are so altered that their skin is likely sloughing off their bodies. Something that would most certainly come with a pungent odor and a look of almost certain death.

In our account, we are told these men "kept their distance" likely because they were told, and perhaps true, that their condition was contagious making them even more isolated from their families and the community. And Jesus recognizes their suffering and "makes them clean". Why "clean" and not "well"? Why did Luke refer to them as "clean"?

And here in lies the true meaning of what Jesus healing truly is. The word clean is important here because it provides a sense of safety or complete eradication of their condition – that their illness no longer poses a

Inspired by workingpreacher.org commentary on Luke 17:11-9 by Rev Eric Barreto.

threat to the other healthy people in the community. Their bodies are not just healed, their lives have been restored. Fair but one.

The "foreigner" who returned to Jesus to praise God and show his gratitude. He is a Samaritan. Someone who would not have been welcome in this community even well. Yet he feels the need to return and express himself in this way.

This moment echoes a deep and recurring theme in Scripture: the spiritual significance of being a stranger in a strange land. The Hebrew Bible is steeped in the experience of exile, migration, and displacement. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet speaks to Israelites carried off to Babylon. He doesn't tell them to resist or escape. Instead, he urges them to settle in, to build homes, plant gardens, raise families. "Seek the welfare of the city," he says, "for in its welfare you will find your own." Even in exile, God's people are called to be agents of peace and flourishing.

This is a hard word for immigrants today—especially in the United States, where many live in fear, face hostility, and are told they do not belong. Jeremiah's message is not one of resignation, but of resilient hope. It says: even when the land is not yours, you can still bless it. Even when your roots are elsewhere, you can still grow here.

And yet, Jeremiah also holds onto God's promise: "I will bring you back." The tension is real. Immigrants live between worlds—between memory and hope, between longing and survival. The call to seek the good of the place where you dwell does not erase the pain of what was lost or the yearning for justice.

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Leviticus reminds us that the people of Israel were once slaves in Egypt. That memory was meant to shape their ethics forever: “You were foreigners once—never forget.” To remember exile is to remember vulnerability. It is to remember what it feels like to be unseen, unwanted, and afraid. And it is to remember that God sees, God hears, and God acts.

In today’s America, where immigrants are detained or denied dignity, the church and we must remember its own story. We are a people shaped by the margins. The Samaritan reminds us that faith is not found in privilege, but in gratitude born from suffering. The immigrant’s journey is not outside the gospel or outside most of our own lives —it is at its very heart. I am first generation and I know many of you are as well.  My father yearned to return to his home in England but he remained proud to be an American Citizen as did his brother and sisters.

Being cut off from community is a deeper sickness than we often realize—and it’s one many are still suffering from today. In the wake of COVID, countless people remain disconnected from the groups that once gave them life. Some have not returned to church. Others have drifted away from social circles, relying instead on handheld devices for connection. But these digital substitutes often fall short. They feed us curated content—what others want us to hear—not necessarily the truth about others, or the truth about the world. And the result? A rise in confusion, anxiety, and fear.

We were made for embodied community—for shared meals, shared worship, shared presence. When that is lost, something sacred is missing. The healing Jesus offers in Luke 17 is not just physical—it’s relational. The men

were restored to their communities. And today, we are called to be part of that same healing work: to reach out, to reconnect, and to remind one another that we belong.

And so we come to the heart of the matter: gratitude.

In Luke 17, only one of the ten healed returns to give thanks—and he is the outsider. His gratitude becomes the doorway to deeper healing, not just of body, but of soul. In a world where exclusion is the norm and connection is fragile, gratitude is a radical act. It reorients us. It reminds us that we are not alone, not forgotten, not forsaken.

Psalm 111 is a song of praise that begins with a bold declaration: "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart." It's not a casual thank-you—it's a full-bodied, communal, intentional act of worship. The psalmist doesn't just feel grateful; he practices it. He names God's works, God's justice, God's faithfulness. Gratitude becomes a lens through which he sees the world—not as a place of scarcity, but of divine abundance.

For immigrants, for the displaced, for those still healing from isolation or trauma, this kind of gratitude is not naive—it's courageous. It's choosing to see God's hand even in exile, even in the unknown. It's choosing to praise even when the future is uncertain. And it's choosing to return, like the Samaritan, and say: "Thank you."

Gratitude is not just a feeling—it's a spiritual posture. It's the beginning of restoration.

Psalm 111 gives us a blueprint for this kind of gratitude. It begins with a bold declaration: **"I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the**

**company of the upright, in the congregation."** This is not private gratitude. It's public. It's communal. It's embodied. The psalmist doesn't just feel thankful—he names it, he shares it, he sings it.

And what does he give thanks for?

- God's works are great.
- God's righteousness endures forever.
- God provides food for those who fear Him.
- God's covenant is remembered.
- God's precepts are trustworthy.

This is not vague optimism. It's rooted in memory. In history. In the lived experience of a people who have known exile, slavery, and displacement—and have also known deliverance.

Gratitude is resistance. It's a refusal to let fear have the final word. It's a way of saying: "God is still good. God is still here. God is still working."

And for us, this is our call. To live our lives in constant gratitude – gratitude for a beautiful sunrise or the lovely changing leaves. Gratitude to health for our provisions. Gratitude for our community, for people who love us, reach to us, support us. And for this church, To be a community where gratitude is practiced. Where the outsider is welcomed. Where healing is not just physical, but relational. Where we remember our own stories of exile and respond with compassion.

Let us be like the Samaritan—returning to Jesus, falling at his feet, and saying thank you.

*Let us pray*

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*Gracious and merciful God, We come before You with hearts open, humbled by Your healing touch and stirred by Your call to gratitude. You see us in our exile, in our loneliness, in our longing to belong—and You do not turn away. You meet us on the margins, just as You met the men in our accounting today, and You restore us to life, to community, to hope.*

*Lord, we thank You for the gift of healing—not just of body, but of soul. We thank You for the grace to return, to fall at Your feet, and to say thank You. Teach us to live with grateful hearts, even in foreign lands, even in uncertain times. Let our praise be bold, like the psalmist's, and let our faith be deep, like the Samaritan's.*

*Make us a people who remember—who remember our own stories of exile, Who remember the strangers among us, Who remember that gratitude is not just a feeling, but a way of life.*

*Bless those who feel far from home today. Bless the immigrant, the refugee, the lonely, the disconnected. May they find welcome in Your presence and in Your people.*

*And may we, Your church, be a place of healing, of belonging, and of thanksgiving. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

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