One in Ten

Women and the Word Ten Narrative on God’s Word by Kris Linner

A Narrative on Luke 17:11-19

You cannot imagine what life was like as a leper. It was desperately depressing. It was a life without hope, absolutely no hope. Leprosy was a horrendous disease that took a physical, emotional and spiritual toll. We had terrible sores all over our bodies, uncomfortable, ugly, ugly sores. F As my disease progressed my lips, nose and ear lobes grew thicker and thicker until my face look like that of a wild beast. Then my limbs became horribly mutilated and in time I began losing my fingers and toes. It was a slow death with no hope for a cure.

But the physical pain was not the worst part of being a leper. The emotional pain was devastating. My life as I knew it ended when I got leprosy. My hopes and dreams for the future were dashed. Jewish law required me to leave my family. What kind of law would make a mother leave her children? How could that be what God wanted for me and my family? Death would have been far easier than exile. You should have seen my children’s faces when IU told them I had to go away. They didn’t understand. How could they? They were so young. They wanted their mother. They needed me. They did not care if I was sick. They did not care what I looked like. I thought my heart would break the day that I left my family. I knew my husband would take good care of the children, but I wanted to be there for them. I wanted to watch them grow up. I wanted to hold them when they were hurt and comfort them when they were afraid. Leprosy took that away from me. The emotional pain of my many losses; health, family, home, was beyond words.

Leprosy also robbed me of my faith. I wondered what kind of God would allow this to happen to me. No one could do anything bad enough to deserve such a terrible, terrible disease. That is what we were taught in the Synagogue. The religious leaders convinced people that those with leprosy deserved the awful disease. It was a punishment for sin. Lepers were viewed as unclean. My faith community abandoned me in my time of need. There was no love from them, only rejection and judgment. It is hard to believe in a loving God when you do not feel the love of God’s people. So, I wondered what was the point of worshiping with those who despised me? What was the point of praising God when leprosy stripped me of everything that was important to me.

I had become a despairing outcast who was forced to wear mourning clothes as if I were dead. Like wild animals, lepers lived in open pits, caves or anywhere else we could find shelter outside the city limits. No healthy person was allowed to come within 50 yards of us. That was the Jewish law. Whenever someone approached we were to cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” How do you think that would make a person feel? Let me tell you, I felt like dirt. That was all that I had to cover my shame-dirt and filth. I spent my days begging for food and my nights praying for death. It was hell. Life as a leper was shell.

There was little to console me, but one thing helped. I was not the only one. A small consolation. Misery loves company. Misery is a great equalizer. There were 10 of us that lived together. It did not matter if you were rich or poor, wife or widower, Gentile or Jew. We were all unclean lepers who had lost everything. We were beggars. We even had a Samaritan living with us. I never would have associated with a Samaritan when I was healthy. The priests had always told us that they were like dogs, half-breeds who were dirty scum. But that no longer mattered among lepers. The presence of a Samaritan could not make us anymore unclean than we already were.

Ten pathetic lepers created our community. Despite our care for one another, life was miserable. We were consumed by hopelessness. There was no cure. So, day after day we waited for our only hope of release, death. Have you ever been that desperate? Have things ever become that bleak?

We were without hope until one day we heard that Jesus was coming. We were filled with a glimmer of hope because we had heard rumor that he could heal lepers. So, when we saw a crowd approaching on the road we cried at the top of our lungs, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

Then an amazing thing happened. Jesus stopped. Most people would pass by on the far side of the road, but Jesus stopped. He stopped and looked each of us in the eye and said, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

We knew what those words meant. Jesus was telling us that we would be healed. You see there were elaborate rules for the cleansing of lepers. One of those rules was the priest had to declare a leper clean before a leper could return to normal life.

We waisted no time. We ran as fast as our marred limbs would carry us hoping we would be given the okay to return to a full life again.

As I made my way to the Synagogue I began to notice a dramatic change. There was a cool sensation on my parched skin. Then I suddenly noticed that my hands were free of sores and my legs were no longer disfigured and discolored.

We began to run faster and faster hoping to have our healing confirmed by the priest. We hurried to do just what Jesus had told us to do-to follow the Jewish law.

There was one of the ten that stopped, the Samaritan. We yelled for him to hurry but he said he needed to thank Jesus. There was no stopping us. Thanking Jesus was the last thing on our minds. We wanted to get to the priest ASAP. The sooner we saw the priest, the sooner we could get back to life was we knew it.

Once the priest deemed me clean, I had no time to turn around and thank Jesus. I wanted to see my family. I wanted to hold my kids and smother them with kisses. Thinking about giving thanks was the last thing on my mind!

The reunion with my family was wonderful. Oh, you cannot imagine our joy. Being together was fabulous. Very quickly we got back into a normal routine. I was cooking and cleaning, going to the well for water, tending to the garden and playing with the children. I got too busy to give thanks.

Giving thanks, that was the difference between the Samaritan and the rest of us who were healed that day. He remembered to give thanks and because of that his healing was complete. He was healed physically and spiritually. The miserable disease of leprosy had been lifted from all of us, but the misery of ingratitude continued to weight heavy on those of us who did not give thanks. Our bodies were healed, but our spirits were not. Only the Samaritan experienced full healing. He lived beyond obedience. He lived with joyful gratitude. His spirit was full of life, life that comes through gratitude, praise and worship to God.

My body was healthy, but I was not healed. Although I was back with my family, I regret that I did not stop to give thanks to Jess. My heart remained marred. I was not filled with life and joy like the Samaritan who did give thanks.

I had good excuses for not giving thanks. I wanted to follow Jesus’ instructions. I wanted to see my children. Then I got too busy with everyday life. All of my excuses were good ones, so I thought I was justified in not giving thanks to Jesus.

Each leper had equally good excuses. One of them was a priest before he got leprosy. He was in a hurry to get back to doing God’s work. Another leper had gotten leprosy by caring for his sick wife. She had died of leprosy and he was too consumed with grief to give thanks. One of the lepers was a little girl. She had lived with the lepers most of her life, so she had not been taught to give thanks. There was one among us who had lived with leprosy for so long that he was not sure he wanted to start over. He was too confused to give thanks. Oh, yes, all but the Samaritan had their excuses for not turning back to give Jesus thanks.

I am sure that you have a few excuses of your own for not giving thanks to God. Maybe you are too busy or too tired. Maybe you are angry at God or have doubts about God’s love for you. The excuses are always there, so I hope and pray that you do not make the same mistake that I did. I beg you to stop this day to give thanks. I don’t want your heart to be heavy like mine. An ungrateful heart eats away at the joy of life. An ungrateful heart blinds us to all the blessings God has given you. It turns us inward.

The Samaritan had it right. He showed us that giving thanks makes your heart whole. A whole heart is filled with exuberant praise, extravagant gratitude and overflowing joy. Be one in ten. Stop and give thanks this day.

**Gratitude**

Gratitude is an opening up. It opens our eyes so that we can see beyond ourselves. It helps us see the need of our neighbors.

Gratitude opens our heart so that we can take in all the gifts that surround us.

Gratitude opens us up to God. It opens us to God’s extravagant, unconditional and abundant love.

Discussion questions:

What struck you in the story?

Gratitude is something that we learn. Who taught you to be grateful? How do you teach others to be grateful?

What does an ungrateful life look like?

What does an attitude of gratitude do for us?

We are facing a difficult time as individuals, as a country and as a world because of COVID-19.

What are some of the emotions you are experiencing?

What have you been grateful for during this time?

How do you express gratitude to God?

Gratitude is a practice. Does anyone have a personal suggestion of how you enhance your practice of gratitude?