

Sermon Given at the Anglican Parish of Kingscliff and Pottsville, 12 October 2025

Readings: Jeremiah 29.1,4-7; Psalm 66.1-11; 2 Timothy 2.(1-7) 8-15; Luke 17.11-19

Theme: The Power of a Grateful Heart.

Friends, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We find ourselves today on the road between Samaria and Galilee, a road Jesus walked, a road where ten desperate men cried out for mercy. They were lepers, isolated by their disease, living in the shadow of death. And Jesus, moved by compassion, heals them with a simple command: “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they go, they are cleansed.

It is a miracle of immense power. Ten were healed. Their world was utterly transformed. But then, the story takes a turn that clearly mattered deeply to Luke, and should matter deeply to us. Only one turns back. Only one, a Samaritan, a foreigner, throws himself at Jesus’ feet, praising God in a loud voice. His heart overflows with gratitude.

And Jesus asks a haunting question: “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?” (Luke 17:17).

This question hangs in the air, not just over first-century Palestine, but over our own lives. How often do we, the recipients of boundless grace, simply forget to say thank you? We are quick to ask, quick to plead, quick to cry out in our need. But how often do we complete the circle of grace by returning to give thanks?

The medieval mystic Meister Eckhart made a stunning claim: “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is ‘thank you,’ it will be enough.” Enough for what? Enough, he would say, for God. Think about that. In the economy of heaven, a heartfelt “thank you” is a complete prayer. It is not a secondary, polite add-on to the real work of petition. It is, in many ways, the real work. It is the prayer that acknowledges that everything—every breath, every healing, every sunrise, every day—is a gift. The one leper who returned understood this. His “thank you” was not just good manners; it was the full expression of his restored relationship with God. It was an act of faith.

This is where Brother David Steindl-Rast’s wisdom illuminates our path. He tells us, “It is not happiness that makes us grateful, but rather gratefulness that makes us happy.” We have it backwards, don’t we? We think, “If I had what he has, if my health were better, if my circumstances changed, then I would be grateful.” But the gospel, and the experience of the grateful leper, shows us the opposite truth. The other nine had their physical healing, but did they have salvation and joy? The one who returned had both physical healing and spiritual restoration, as well as deep and profound joy.

And notice what Jesus says to him: “Rise and go; your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:19). The original Greek here is richer. It could be translated, “Your faith has saved you.” Or, “Your faith has made you whole.” His gratitude was not separate from his faith; it was the active, visible expression of it. By returning to give thanks, he was acknowledging the source of his blessing. He was putting his faith not in the gift of healing, but in the Giver, Jesus himself. To thank Jesus is an act of faith. It is to say, “I see your hand at work in my life, I trust you, and I entrust all to you.”

We live in a world that fights against this. Psychologists call it the “negativity bias.” Our brains are like Velcro for bad experiences and Teflon for good ones. We are hardwired to notice the threat, the lack, the problem. This was a survival mechanism for our ancestors, but for us, it can become a prison of pessimism, anxiety, and entitlement. We focus on the one thing we don’t have, rather than the nine things we do.

How do we overcome this? Through the deliberate, daily practice of grateful living. It is a spiritual discipline. It is choosing to be the one who turns back. We choose to see the gifts, name them, and thank the Giver. Let us thank him for the gift of creation—for the stunning beauty of the Tweed Coast and our Australian home.

Let us thank him for the gift of redemption—for the cross where our ‘leprosy’ of sin was healed, for a love so profound it would rather die than live without us.

And let us thank him for the abundance we have in this nation—for peace, for prosperity, for freedom to worship. For the food on our tables and the community that surrounds us. These are not rights to be demanded, but gifts to be received with humble thanks.

And here is the final, beautiful truth: God is moved by our gratitude. The story shows us that Jesus noticed the one who returned (see Luke 17:17). Our thanksgiving gets God’s attention. It completes the circle of relationship. It delights the heart of our Father.

So, my friends, let us rise and go, like the healed leper. Let our lives become a continuous, unrelenting prayer of “thank you.” For in that prayer, we find not only enough for God, but enough for us—enough faith, enough joy, and the salvation that makes us truly, completely whole. May God help us in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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