

placed it on his chest. "Stranger" he said, "Do you see that worm? I was that perishing creature. I was dying in my sins, hopeless, helpless, and on the brink of eternal fire. It was Jesus Christ who put forth the arm of his grace, and plucked me from the fire. It was Jesus Christ, who placed me, a poor sinful worm, near the heart of his love. That is the reason why I talk of Jesus Christ and make much of him - because I love him."

I wonder if we ever ponder upon what we have been rescued from, and how grateful we ought to be for it. I guess for some of us who have felt the lick of fire from time to time might be more inclined to gratitude, and yet all of us have been lifted out from the valley of the lepers.

We laughed at my opening story because, maybe because we haven't broken the 7th commandment. But by the God's grace so go I, we all struggle in one way or another, it may be the first or the third commandment, it may well be the 8th but whatever it is we all fail, we all have something about us that needs rescuing from the ring of fire...

So are we like the 9 who while grateful imagine that all would have been well anyway, or are we like the one who really knows what we have been saved from and show gratitude for it...

Psalms 103 says "Bless the LORD, O my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of his benefits; who forgives all my wickedness; who heals all my diseases; who redeems my life from the pit; who crowns me with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies my years with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle. The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. He will not always strive with us; nor will he keep his anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our wickedness. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his name.

Today, you've touched more people than the leper in our gospel reading had touched in years. Today, you've been close to friends, or family. Maybe had a hug or a kiss, today you will eat good nutritious food and laugh because all is well with your soil. But not him. He longed for a loving touch more than he longed for food. More than he needed water, he needed love and before he was healed, while there was still a tremendous risk, he called out to Jesus who reached forward and gave him his hand. Nothing scars us so badly that Jesus won't touch us. No sin can make us unlovable, unforgivable unreachable. For Jesus is willing to call us his friend, and stand beside us.

In this eucharist that we will shortly celebrate, we will remember that it was his death that paid for our sin, his cry of dereliction that caused us to be free.

No fear disqualifies us, no problem is insurmountable, no failure that can negate his love.

The miracle that we enjoy today is the love of Jesus. No exceptions, no qualifications, no doubts.

He simply loves you and for that, we must surely show our gratitude. **Amen.**

St Mary's Sanderstead - 13.10.19

Gratitude for what God has done Luke:11-19.

A vicar lost his bike which he relied heavily upon to get around his small rural parish. He knew didn't just disappear, so he put two and two together and figured out that someone in the parish - most likely one of the young people in his flock had stolen it.

So he came up with a plan. He'd preach on the 10 commandments the following Sunday and when he got to 'Thou shalt not steal', he'd pause and look carefully around the congregation, to see if he couldn't pick out a red face and so identify the culprit. The plan seemed to be going well. He prepared his sermon, Sunday came, and he started to work his way through the commandments, planning to reach his crescendo at the 8th 'Thou shalt not steal'. The only problem was that when he reached the 7th 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' - he remembered where he'd left his bike!

In our gospel reading Jesus was in no-man's land, an undefined area in the region between Samaria and Galilee - a place that may not have been on anybody's map because this where lepers lived! And we read that as he entered the village, ten lepers approached him.

Keeping their distance, they called out, Jesus, have mercy on us, and the reason they kept their distance because they were 'unclean'.

Now I don't know if you've ever met anyone you would consider 'unclean'. I've certainly met plenty of people whose body odour was such, that they might very gain that title but I've never met a leper.

In Jesus' time, Leprosy in the same way that cancer maybe today was the most feared of all diseases.

If you were a Leper you lost contact with your family, you lost your job, and you had no hope. You certainly couldn't kiss your children, or enjoy family celebrations because you were an outcast, you were alone and impoverished. The Irony is that Hansen's disease is one of the least infectious of contagious diseases and the easiest way for it to advance is through poor nutrition. And yet the traditional way of treating lepers was to isolate these people and leave them to fend for themselves, where they would quickly become malnourished.

But let's not be too harsh on folk because this somewhat brutal procedure for dealing with lepers came from the book of Leviticus, where it says, that when a person had on their skin a swelling, an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease, they must be brought to the priest, where they would be examined and if the hair in that diseased area had turned white and appeared to be deeper than the skin they would be pronounced unclean. (Leviticus 13:2-3) Such a verdict would have been a fate worse than death and the terrible descent would begin. Your belongings would be bundled up, none of your family would dare to kiss you goodbye. Your neighbours would shut themselves in as you made your final walk down your street, away from civilization, towards the colony of lepers who would be your companions for the rest of your life.

With this disfigured and rejected group you would eek out the rest of your existence, as you yourself gradually became more hideous and disfigured until you died a lonely death. And as if that's not bad enough, none of your family would ever come to bury you! They might not even know that you had died. And they might not want to know, as you were probably the shame of your family, with the community wondering what wicked thing you had done to deserve such a fate.

This was life of these 10 men who called to Jesus that day.

Two friends met each other on the street one day. One looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears and so his friend asked what on earth had happened. The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you, three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me a £100,000. "Why that's a lot of money". "Well!" he said, "Two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me another £150,000." "It Sounds to me that you've been very blessed." "You don't understand!" he interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away and I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her." Now the man's friend was by now really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?" "This week, he said I got nothing!"

We live in a world where for some what they have is never enough...

Bishops avenue in Hampstead is one of the most expensive roads in the world where the average cost of a house is £15 million, and yet many of them are empty and derelict, owned by people who bought them in 1980's and who have so much money that they simply don't know what to do with it.

Perhaps as we consider how these 10 men who called out to Jesus, had so little and how some people in the world can't even afford to buy food, we can but feel ashamed at how blessed we are and yet how often we grumble.

It's easy perhaps to be so concerned with what's ahead, that we fail to realise what's actually in front of us.

So why was it that only one leper came back? Did Jesus run out of power?

Maybe one of the men waited to see if his cure was real.

Another to see if it would last.

Perhaps one said he would see Jesus later.

And another concluded that it was never leprosy in the first place.

Maybe one thought that it was just luck or that any priest could have done it, whatever the reason 9 went on their way and for all we know never interacted with Jesus again.

It's really easy to find a reason not to be grateful for what we have and to conclude that what we do have is through our own hard work and nothing to do with God. So gratitude doesn't come into it!

I'm sure you've seen some of the programmes where people on benefits have really harsh and angry things to say against the state that feeds, houses and clothes them, that it's not fair that it's not enough

We live in a world that believes it's our right to have the very best, that in some way we deserve it.

Countless sermons have been preached about the healing of the ten lepers, focusing attention on the theme of gratitude. But the thrust of many of them has been that Jesus healed ten, but that only one of them was grateful.

But that's not true, it's inconceivable that anyone who'd experienced such misery wouldn't be grateful for receiving instant healing.

So I don't think that it's the 9 weren't grateful but rather that they showed no gratitude, for its one thing to feel grateful; it is another to express it.

I once had woman who came into our food bank in Sale and after giving her several bags of shopping, she proceeded to take items out of the bags and ask me to replace them as she didn't like those items and wanted something of better quality. Another took the shopping out of the door and sold them right in front of the church. In the summer, I gave someone outside Tesco a new sleeping bag and tent, and yet the following day he asked me for another one because he'd lost them...

Disgraceful I hear you thinking....

"If it's manna, we wish we had quail. If it's cereal, we want eggs.

One writer summed up our society like this...If we have a red coat, we want a black one, If we do not have cancer, we complain about our arthritis. If we have a car, we wish we had another one. We dream of a better job because we could be doing so much better than we are now.

Matthew Henry was an early American preacher and most people who have been to bible college have used a copy of his commentary on the Bible. Once, while traveling to preach, Henry was robbed. Now most people wouldn't think that would be a circumstance in which you could give thanks, but he did. He wrote: "I am thankful that during these years I have never been robbed before. Also, even though they took my money, they did not take my life.

Although they took all I had, it was not much. Finally, I am grateful that it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

An American Indian whose evident love for Christ prompted a man to ask, "What has this Jesus ever done for you that you would make such a fuss over Him?" The converted Indian didn't answer him in words. He gathered together some dry leaves and moss and made a ring with them on the ground. He picked up a live worm and put it in the middle of the ring. He struck a match and set the moss and leaves on fire. The flames soon arose and the heat scorched the worm. It writhed in agony and after trying in vain to escape on every side, curled itself up in the middle as if about to die in despair. At that moment the Indian put his hand into the middle of the flames, picked up the worm and gently