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Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, Virginia

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
October 12, 2025

# "I Thank You God"

When someone gives you a gift, has you over for dinner, or helps you with a project, what do you do afterward? I should hope you say "thank you" or write a thank-you note. From my youth, I was taught the importance of writing thank-you notes. We had to have special stationery for such notes. It could not be lined notebook paper. It should be nice cards and envelopes from the stationery store. I learned that cream colored paper was best with matching envelopes. I remember Crane was the brand of choice. While using nice stationery was good, what was essential was writing the note in your own hand and getting it in the mail promptly.

Sending a thank-you note is a sign of good manners, but there is more to living a grateful life. Indeed, there are those who commend a life of gratitude as a way of being happier and having a more positive outlook on life. Research studies show that being grateful helps people live healthier lives.[1] Gratitude can also, not surprisingly, make us more aware of things for which to be grateful. With an attitude of gratitude, one has a sense of abundance rather than scarcity. The reasoning is that if we focus on what we are grateful for, we are more likely to see things to be grateful for.

Our predisposition can have a strong influence on how we feel. Do we bask in a sunny, cloudless day or grumble because of the glare? Do we appreciate a nice steady rain that nourishes the earth and makes puddles to jump in, or do we think rainy days are gloomy and wish for sunshine? To some extent, it is all in how we view life. Are we Piglet or Eeyore?

However, life is not bifurcated into white or black. A lot of life, indeed, most of life falls in between. Jesus meets the ten lepers in such a land between Galilee and Samaria. It was a sort of DMZ between two areas that were at odds. People could travel through the two areas, but their reception would not be friendly. Remember the parable of The Good Samaritan from earlier in Luke's Gospel.[2] The surprise of the parable was that the Samaritan did the right thing by caring for the injured man, whereas the Jewish leaders did not. These two people's religions sprang from the same origin, but they each consider the other apostate because they had different holy mountains and different scriptures. Family feuds are the worst.

The lepers are standing in an in-between place geographically when they encounter Jesus. This matches their outcast social standing because of their illness. Neither Jews nor Samaritans want to have anything to do with them.

As Jesus and his followers walk along, the group of lepers shouts out to them. They ask Jesus to have mercy on them. This is not a request for a cure per se. Rather, they want to be recognized and perhaps receive a blessing. Any good thing that they can experience would be better than a life of being shunned by the world. Jesus responds by telling them to show themselves to the priests. While he did not say you are cured, the implication was that you would be. The only reason to show themselves to a priest was for the priest to pronounce them clean and therefore able to return to society and the Temple. The group then heads off to find a priest, something that

[1] Cleveland Clinic, "7 Ways To Boost Your Health by Practicing Gratitude" https://health.clevelandclinic.org/gratitude-for-wellness, accessed October 11, 2025.
[2] Luke 10:30-37

might require them to travel to Jerusalem, one hundred miles away. But with the hope of life renewed, such a trip might seem easy.

However, one of the group, having been healed, turns back to offer Jesus thanks. I think that the nine who kept going are not necessarily ungrateful. After all, they were following Jesus' command. Perhaps they feared that if they turned back, they would become ill again.

Whether or not this is the case, what Jesus points out is that there is only one man who returned to show his gratitude. What's more, this man is not a faithful Jew but a despised Samaritan. Throughout the gospels, Jesus points out faithfulness that goes against stereotypes. He identifies the faith of Roman soldiers, tax collectors, and prostitutes in contrast to Israelites, Pharisees, scribes, priests, and the wealthy. In these examples, the people to whom Israelite society looked to for examples of piety and righteousness are shown up by those whom they would spurn. Jesus likes to pop the balloon of our righteousness and self-congratulatory piety.

Giving thanks to God is a crucial part of our formation as Christians. Thirteenth-century mystic and theologian Meister Eckhart said, "If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough." So often our prayers are prayers of petition, and while there is nothing wrong with that, it is good to get in a thank you now and then. That thank you note goes a long way, even with God.

e. e. cummings wrote a poem of praise and gratitude that begins:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes[3]

The Samaritan in this scene is one of the few people in the Gospels who receives healing and then actually gives thanks to Jesus. Some go on their way in celebration. Others simply disappear from the narrative. They might fall at his feet in supplication, but they do not do likewise when their requests are fulfilled. It is remarkable.

In this situation, when the man expresses his gratitude, he gets much more than the healing of his disease. Jesus' response to his gratitude is that his faith has made him well. The Greek word behind that statement is *sozos.* That word can be translated as salvation as well as healing, so what Jesus is telling him is that his "faith has saved" him. All ten received healing from their leprosy, but only the Samaritan was given salvation.

The psalmist wrote, "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,/ in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation."[4] Or as we say in the Eucharistic Prayer, "It is a right and good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty." We can never go wrong by giving thanks to God. Look for God at work in the good and the difficult of life. Look for opportunities to express gratitude. Begin and end each day in gratitude. If you cannot think of the right words, just shout or murmur or whisper, "I thank you God for most this amazing day. Amen." That is enough.

[3] e. e. cummings, from "i thank You God for most this amazing"
[4] Psalm 111:1 Book of Common Prayer translation.