

Changing the World, Together

Luke 17:11-19

From the Pulpit of
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
October 9th, 2022
Matt Matthews

I'm holding a pledge card in my hand, and, with it, I endeavor to change the world.

Every time I write a check to the church, I think two thoughts. The first is, "Thank you, Lord." The second is, "Can I do more?"

The first thought is gratitude. *Thank you, Lord.* God loves me no matter what. God has surrounded me with a loving church, a loving family. God has given me gifts to share. God has created a beautiful world. *Thank you, God,* is my response.

Gratitude is the attitude.

One of my favorite hymns is "In the Bleak Midwinter." The last verse gets me every time I sing it.

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

(#144 *In the Bleak Midwinter*, text, Christina Rossetti, 1872.
Music, Gustav Holst, 1906)

Gratitude is the attitude. Because God loves me no matter what, I want to live a life of thanks. I want every penny I spend and everything I do bring honor to God.

One of my favorite hymns is "Amazing Grace." The last verse gets me every time I sing it.

*When we've been there, ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise,
Than when we'd first begun.*

(#649 *Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound*,
text (of 5th verse) Albert Tsoie, 1790.
Music, Columbia Harmony, 1892)

Gratitude is the attitude. Because God walks with me no matter what I want to live a life of thanks. The psalmist puts it this way, "Let everything that breathes, praise the Lord" (Psalm 150).

One of my favorite hymns is, well, you get the idea. Our hymns reach to capture the gratitude God's grace invites us to feel. Our opening hymn underscored that gratitude just a moment ago:

*It is not the work of my hands
That has washed away all my sins.*

*I'm redeemed, and all of my days,
Jesus Christ will be my heart's praise.*

(#832, *Here on Jesus Christ I will Stand*, text from a Kenyan hymn,
adapt. Greg Scheer, 2007. Music, Kenyan melody)

In our closing hymn, we'll sing these words of gratitude:

*Your Spirit is our teacher, the light that guides our search,
Transforming broken people into the holy church.
For feeding us with mercy, for wisdom you impart:
Sincerely and completely, I offer you my heart.*

(#694, *Great God of Every Blessing*, text David Gambrell, 2009.
Music Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1864.)

Gratitude is the attitude. I know that's a cliché, but it expresses what I'm trying to say so well.

The Interfaith Alliance of Champaign County is hosting a community gathering before Thanksgiving. We aren't sure what to call it. A Grateful Gathering? Gathering Gratefully? A Thanksgiving Gathering of Gratitude? Of Grateful People? (Join us on Sunday, November 20th at 3:00, site to be announced soon.) What words do we use? *Appreciation, thankfulness, gratitude*. Whatever words we chose, gratitude is the attitude.

A friend told me this joke^[1]. A little boy looked up to his pastor one Sunday and said, "Pastor, when I grow up, I'm going to give you some money."

The pastor nodded and said, "Well that's great. That's very generous. But why, may I ask, are you going to give me some money?"

"Because my daddy says you're the poorest preacher he's ever known."

I'm one preacher who isn't poor. I might be a bad preacher, but I'm not poor. I'm rich. I'm rich because God loves me and has blessed me with you, a church family. I'm rich, and with this pledge card, I endeavor to change the world.

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Every time I write a check to the church, I think two thoughts. The first is, "Thank you, Lord." *Thank you, thank you, thank you*. The second thought is, "Can I do more?"

I want to give more. I want to be more. I want to do more. This is a question of stewardship. How do I use my whole self—talent, time, and treasure—for God's glory.

Our text today gives us a clue about being a good steward. Ten lepers ask Jesus to have mercy on them. He tells them to go present themselves to the priests. On their way to see the priests, they are made well. Of the ten, only one returns to thank Jesus.

The other nine have done nothing wrong. They are doing exactly, obediently what Jesus told them to do. They are probably happy, and relieved, and thankful. As soon as the priests determine that they are clean, they can rejoin society. They can return to their family. They, probably, are eager to do so. They're getting a second lease on life, and we are happy for them. They probably want to use this second chance wisely and well. They probably want to be live as good stewards of God's grace they received at the word of Jesus. They are doing nothing wrong.

But only one leper returns to say, "Thanks." This leper threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. Luke throws in a little barb here; this leper was not a respected member of the community, a good Jew. He was a Samaritan, an outsider.

"Were not ten made clean?" Jesus asked. "But the other nine, where are they?"

Stewardship begins with gratitude. Stewardship is not just about giving money; it's about giving thanks. Stewardship is not about fulfilling a budget; it's about living a fulfilling life of service to God. Stewardship is about harnessing everything God has given us to use for God's good and for God's glory. When we live this way, it changes everything.

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I'm holding a pledge card in my hand, and, with it, I endeavor to change the world.

Join me.

AMEN.

^[1] Probably Harold Tarelton.