I believe today’s readings invite reflection around gratitude. Rather than just talk about being thankful to God, I thought we might take a moment to remember gratitude is a verb so let’s put it into practice. I invite you to turn to someone nearby, introduce yourself and together on your slips of paper make a list of what you are thankful. If you aren’t in a place for conversing with a stranger today, please know you are more than welcome to take a moment and make a list on your own. Ready, set, go.

I encourage you to continue to share after worship with one another what you are thankful for. Yet, during worship I invitation you to place your list in the offering plate as a practice of giving thanks to God.

Pray

Jesus is traveling and he encounters 10 men. We don’t know their names, initially we don’t know where any are from, instead the only identifier given is that they have a skin disease. In the past it would have been labeled leprosy but for the sake of the story all the author needs you to know is that they are sick and their illness is their identity. Due to the Jewish religious laws and traditions of the time the 10 men must keep their distance from everyone, for any contact would make an otherwise healthy person ritualistically unclean. So the men are sick and isolated. Desperate to be healed they approach Jesus still keeping their distance.

Then in a moment that initially seems odd, Jesus orders them to go see the priests. In Ancient times there weren’t Emergency Rooms or Urgent Cares and so Priests were the ones who declared you healed. Priests weren’t doctors nor even healers but they were the ones who could look you up and down and give you a clean bill of health. They gave permission for the sick to rejoin the community. For the ten men to listen to Jesus and head off to see the priests before being healed is an act of obedience. They could have objected saying “don’t waste our time heal us and then we will go” but they don’t. Instead healing happens as they go. On the journey they are healed. Here is where gratitude enters the story.

(Insert Picture)

Having been cleansed from the skin disease and now able to again be in relationship with their families and friends only one turns back to say, “Thank You.” We see one artists from Cameroon’s interpretation of the moment. Only one acknowledges Jesus as the source of his wellbeing and now an additional piece of his identity is revealed. He is a Samaritan, a foreigner, someone with different cultural and religious practices. Yet, these differences are not a barrier or obstacle for Jesus as Christ declares, “Go your faith has made you well.”

There seems to be a distinction in the story, Jesus made all 10 clean. But only the Samaritan is made well. He is whole. Not only is he restored to community but he is in community with Christ through faith. Faith that was expressed in Thanksgiving. Jesus lifts up gratitude, acknowledging God as the origin of all the good that we have, as a fundamental action of faith. The other nine do not lose their healing. Jesus did not make faith, payment, or even a particular identity as a requirement. However, the healed Samaritan man praises Jesus as a natural response to this amazing gift.

I wonder, how are we as individuals and we as a faith community putting gratitude into practice? I don’t simply mean are you sending thank you cards, are you having good manners, or are you saying yes whenever the cashier asks to round up your dollar? What does it look like for us to acknowledge God with praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude?

On a fundamental level worship is gratitude in action. We gather to give thanks with a grateful heart. With prayer, song, water, word, and meal we give thanks to the Creator, redeemer, and Sustainer that has made us well. The hope is that when we engage in worship we are transformed, changed, renewed to then live lives of praise. Lives that as the Prophet Jeremiah implores seek the welfare of the city. Welfare here is actually the word shalom, the text could be read as to seek the peace, the wholeness, the wellbeing of where God has planted us. We seek Shalom as an act of praise when we support our food pantry, when we host support groups here at church, when we welcome neighbors and strangers into this community. Where else might we turn praise into action? Not to earn love but in response to What God has already done? Perhaps even praise that if it is not defying gravity certainly defies expectations.

After a horrific act of violence just a few weeks ago on a church in Grand Blanc Michigan, a number of Mormons have responded with unexpected generosity. Funds were being raised to support the families of victims when David Butler a Mormon from Utah started a fundraiser for the wife and child of the perpetrator. 8,500 folks have now raised over $400,000. For some it is an act of grace, others an act of compassion for a widow and 10 year old child, whatever motivated individual donners this is most certainly radical love in action.

Faith compels acts of gratitude and generosity that are irrational to the rest of the world. Nine of the 10 did return to see Jesus. They probably ran right to their families after visiting the priest. After being away for so long who can blame them for wanting to return to their lives as soon as possible. Yet, one broke from the norm, one defied expectation when faith led him to praise. We give thanks that God in Christ also defied expectations. Healing freely. Healing those society wanted to keep away. Healing a foreigner, outsiders so that we might know no one is outside God’s love. You are never outside of God’s radical love in Christ Jesus. May go confident that our faith has made us well. Thanks be to God. Amen.