### Jeremiah 29:1; 4-7 New International Version (NIV)

**29**This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

**4**This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: **5**“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.**6**Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. **7**Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

### Luke 17:11-19 New International Version (NIV)

**11**Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. **12**As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+17:11-19#fen-NIV-25664a)**]** met him. They stood at a distance **13**and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

**14**When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

**15**One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. **16**He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

**17**Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? **18**Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” **19**Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

“Thanks in a Foreign Land?”

Lisa J. Durkee

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

“By the rivers of Babylon, where we sat down, and yea we wept, when we remembered Zion. Oh, the wicked carry us away, captivity, require from us a song. How can we sing King Alpha’s song in a strange land. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your site, O Fari.”

Israelites not vacationing in Babylon when they are asked to sing their songs. They have been exiled to Babylon, have been driven away from their homes, and are asked to SING; are required to sing, as we read in Psalm 137, “our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" Can you imagine?

But then, imagine this: those exiles who were favored in Babylon, and who later worked to prevent the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem were the Samaritans. The difficulties, the real enmity with the Samaritans were many hundreds of years old. So, it’s no wonder that Jesus uses the figure of a Samaritan in the parable we call by the name reminding us of a Samaritan’s goodness. In today’s Gospel lesson, though, it is not a parable we hear, but a true story of the healing of ten persons—only one of whom thanks Jesus.

Sometimes, we may find it quite difficult to relate a biblical story to anything in our current life, or even in our remembered history. Really, let’s think of some examples in recent history to help us understand a bit better: Nazi Germany; Abu Graihb. What song might those who were imprisoned and tortured have sung? But the passage from Jeremiah that refers to this singing notes that to wish for, to pray for prosperity for captors reaps benefits for all. Thanks – giving . . . Where do we see it, and why is it so very difficult to offer sometimes?

I wonder how many of you who have had young children in your families have NOT tried to instill what we call good manners in them. I wonder, though, if any of us have pressed the point with them: Be sure to be especially nice; to be especially polite to people who are most awful to you.

Philip Jenks reflected on today’s Gospel lesson in consideration of today being World Mission Sunday—a fact I was somehow unaware of until reading his piece. When thinking of the lengths that many people have gone to proclaim the good news of God’s saving grace in Jesus, Jenks reminds us that we are not called to be comfortable. We are called to remember God’s love for us, and to respond. “*When Jesus saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.*  
*Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.*  
*Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”*  
*Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:14-19)*  
  
Jenks writes the following as he considers this particularly difficult quality in Jesus: “Don’t you love it when Jesus confounds us by not judging the very people we would hate? The one leper who returned to thank Jesus: ***“And he was a Samaritan!”*** For us, he might as well be saying:  “And he was a fracker, a defiler of clean water, a polluter of air!” “And he was a jihadist!” “And he was a Wall Street exploiter!” “And he was a Congressman!”  
  
But this brief passage in Luke makes it clear Jesus doesn’t care about any of that. Jesus sees ten suffering persons. He doesn’t evaluate their ethnicity, their religion, their nationality, their profession, their age, their intelligence, or their financial status. All he sees is ten suffering people, and with barely a flick of his hand he sends them away to show the priest they have been healed. No doubt all ten emerge from the temple blotto with joy, barely able to comprehend their unexpected good fortune, too intoxicated to notice God has given them an incomparable gift.  
  
But one – the fracker, the jihadist, the exploiter, the Congressman, the *Samaritan* – remembers where his good fortune comes from and returns to Jesus to thank him.  
  
Is Jesus angry with the nine other ex-lepers? I doubt it. He can hardly be unaware of the joy and gratitude they must feel.  
  
But I think Jesus may be amused by the fact that the one ex-leper who did remember to say thanks was the same one all the others may have despised. “Where are they?” Jesus asks. And I think he may have asked it with a smile. The Samaritan standing gratefully before him is a reminder of how God’s unconditional love gets lost amid the conflicts and prejudices of human affairs.”  
  
And I would ask how we might remember God’s gifts to us. Do you remember that the other nine lepers who were healed in fact did just what Jesus had asked them to do? They turned and went to show themselves to the priests. They did what they were supposed to do. Still, there is much more that they might have done, beyond what they were simply told to do. We know that the one leper, the Samaritan who returned to express his thanks has a special place in this story not because he did what he was supposed to do, but because he was grateful for what Jesus had done for him. How might *we* change our behaviors and our attitudes to reflect our gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ? Might we, in fact, seek out those who are different from us in creed, in skin color or even in political opinion and love one another? Might we step out from the comfort of our abundant living and share with those who live not with abundance but with scarcity?

We *can* do more than we are “supposed” to do. We can set aside time in our busy lives to remember God’s gifts to us. One way we do this is to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. We can say that *it matters* to us to set aside time for God. We can set aside time in our busy lives to *do* for others. Maybe that means bringing a meal to Dismas Family Farm; maybe it means setting aside a day to shop for our Sharing Cupboard food pantry. Maybe it means taking the time and setting aside the resources to make one of the first checks we write each month be to the church; or to a hospital that relies on gifts to heal; or to set aside one day’s pay a month to give in any other way we *know* will help others. How do we say thank you to God for all that God does for us?

If we have enough sense to return to Jesus to express our thanks for his healing grace, he will smile and tell us, ***“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”*** Thanks be to God!