

**+ Luke 17:11-19 + Series: 364 Days of Thanksgiving +
+ Theme: Uncommon Mercy Leads to Uncommon Thanksgiving¹ +
+ 5th Sunday after the Epiphany + 5 February 2017 +**

Some things you don't see every day: a dwarf blue sheep (only about two hundred in existence); William Shakespeare's original autograph (only six known copies); and an original Double Eagle \$20 gold coin (only one left, which is privately owned and worth more than seven million dollars).

All of those things are extremely rare. They are uncommon. This morning, as we begin a new series on gratitude, we are going to see two other things we don't see every day: uncommon mercy and uncommon gratitude.

In the lesson before us, we find Jesus beginning his last, long journey to Jerusalem. In just a few short weeks, a crown of thorns will be thrust upon his head. A scourge will tear into his back, and a hammer will drive nails into his hands and feet. Ultimately, God will place the condemning judgment for all the sin of our entire world on his almighty back.

As Jesus headed south to Jerusalem, he came to a village near the border between the regions of Galilee and Samaria. Just as he was about to enter the village, ten men suffering from leprosy call out to him from a distance.

Now leprosy is uncommon today. Cases in the United States are extremely rare. In fact, leprosy has been almost completely eradicated from most parts of the world. So it's a disease you don't see every day, but in Jesus' day, it was quite common. In Jesus' day, a person who suffered from leprosy was forced to live far away from other people in what were called leper colonies. There they slowly died a very painful death.

These lepers, however, had heard about Jesus. From a distance they tried to yell out to him. Because one of the first places leprosy attacks is the vocal chords, it was probably hard for them to yell. So just imagine those men with scratchy voices crying out, ***"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"***

It would not be uncommon for you or me to feel sorry for people with leprosy. Go online, search *leprosy*, and take a look at the pictures. They'll break your heart. In Jesus' day, some felt sorry for them too, but most people simply looked down on them. It was quite common for people to think, "If God struck them with leprosy, they must have done something pretty terrible to deserve it." Yet Jesus showed them mercy. In fact, he showed them uncommon mercy.

Remember where Jesus was headed? He was on his way to Jerusalem to die. The weight of the world was on his shoulders. He had very important, world-impacting things to do, but that didn't stop him from helping those men.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus had shown uncommon mercy to another leper. On that occasion, he actually reached out and touched the man to heal him. Back then, that was unheard of. Lepers were extremely contagious. They were considered physically and ceremonially unclean. No one could go near them, let alone touch them, but that didn't stop Jesus.

So we see Jesus' uncommon mercy on display again. He told the ten lepers to show themselves to the high priest or one of the other priests. The priests declared a person clean (or healthy) from leprosy. The priests declared that person able to return to family, to worship at the temple, and to rejoin life in society. On the way to the priests, Jesus miraculously healed the ten lepers. He didn't just give them a few shekels or say a few sympathetic platitudes. No, he changed their lives forever. He gave them a new life—a new beginning. The mercy he showed them was truly uncommon.

How does Jesus' mercy compare with the mercy we show today? We may feel sorry for those who suffer, but what steps do we take to alleviate their suffering? Maybe we send a few dollars to help those suffering from the Ebola virus in Africa, but who of us will leave home and job to fly to Africa to volunteer to help change the lives of those suffering people? That kind of mercy is uncommon. Maybe we give a few bucks or some food to a person who is down and out, but how many of us invite that person into our homes, provide a job, or spend a significant amount of time helping turn that person's life around? That kind of mercy is uncommon...but that is the kind of mercy Jesus showed!

¹ This sermon was adapted from a 2016 stewardship sermon series—*364 Days of Thanksgiving*—by Rev. Andrew Schroer.

Remember what Jesus was about to do! He was about to suffer the punishment, the pain, the hell we all deserve for our sins. Yet that didn't keep him from showing great mercy. Jesus kept on loving, kept on helping, kept on giving—something you and I rarely do.

Over the years, we've had a small food pantry here at church to help people in need, but sometimes you run into people who don't seem very grateful for our assistance or who actually complain about what they receive. When that happens, it's easy to think you're being used or taken advantage of. It's hard to help ungrateful people who complain about the gifts or assistance given to them.

Yet isn't it true that you and I are no less ungrateful and complaining when it comes to the gifts we receive from Jesus? We prove that none of us deserves a single blessing from his hand. Think about this. Jesus showed us the greatest act of charity in human history by sacrificing everything to win for us forgiveness and heaven. He suffered the whippings and beatings and mocking. He suffered the hellish punishment of the holy God himself for all of those selfish sins that are all too common inside each of us.

...But how do you and I usually respond? Every day we fall into the same foolish and selfish sins. We seldom thank Jesus at all! Yes, occasionally you might remember to say a quick, "Thank you," but most of the time you and I take his mercy for granted. Then we have the gall to get upset when he doesn't give us everything we want when we want it. In spite of all that, however, God continues to forgive us and love us and show us charity. That is uncommon mercy!

Uncommon things are often extremely valuable. For example, the rarest baseball card in the world is a 1909 Honus Wagner T206 tobacco card. Only a handful exist. Ten years ago in 2007, a near-mint version of the card sold for \$2.8 million. Yet the uncommon mercy of our Savior is worth more than all the rare baseball cards and coins and jewels and treasures of the world. His uncommon mercy won heaven for you. His uncommon mercy shows itself in everything you have and everything you are. Not a single one of us deserves any of it.

That's why Jesus' uncommon mercy deserves uncommon gratitude. After Jesus told the lepers to show themselves to the priests, all ten lepers left. Can you imagine what it must have been like as the lepers went to the priests? They started to notice their joints no longer hurt. Strength came back to their muscles. Their skin cleared up. Their voices returned. They were healed! Imagine them pick up the pace and begin to run. Then one of them stopped in his tracks. He turned around and ran back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice. He fell at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

We aren't told anything more about the other nine. We can only assume that they too were thankful, at least to some degree. After all, they were just healed from a painful, debilitating disease. Maybe some even considered going back to thank Jesus, but can you understand why they got so caught up in their homecoming celebrations and the excitement of their new lives?

How often doesn't that happen to you and me? For example, you see someone suffer a tragedy or loss. It makes you realize how blessed you are. You think to yourself, "As soon as I get home, I am going to tell my children, my spouse how much I love them. From now on, I am going to live each day as if it were my last." Then a couple hours pass. You get busy with your life. By the time you get home, you forget to tell your family how much you love them. Nothing significantly changes.

Another example. Sometimes you come to church and the message of Christ's uncommon mercy moves you. You feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude to God. You may even say a prayer of thanks to him. You put a little more in the offering plate that Sunday to thank him. You think to yourself how you are going to change your life—how from now on you are going to live for God. You imagine all the changes you are going to make, but then you get home. You get distracted by the TV—the Super Bowl is on tonight!—or the snow or family or work—and those feelings and thoughts quickly drift away. Nothing really changes.

Look again at the uncommon gratitude of that lone leper. He didn't even make it to the priests, even though he could get in trouble for that, but he couldn't help it. He had to go back to the Source. He had to thank his Savior and God...and he was a Samaritan. He wasn't even from the Jewish nation. He didn't have the benefit of growing up in the Jewish worship and temple life, but he was so thankful! He wanted everyone to see, everyone to hear, everyone to know what God had done for him.

My friends, don't settle for the easy thank you. Don't settle for flippantly saying, "Oh, yeah, we're blessed. We have a lot of things to be thankful for." That's easy to say. Instead, show uncommon gratitude. Let it show in how you worship here at church and how you give of your time and your talents and your treasures to the Lord. Let

it show in the way you carry out your God-given callings at home or at school or at work. Let it show as you actively perform acts of uncommon mercy out there in the world.

In order to show this uncommon gratitude, you need to revisit again and again the uncommon mercy your Savior has shown you and still shows you. Every moment of his life he showed love. He helped. He healed. He did that because you so often fail to love and help and heal. In your life he continues to show you undeserved love, forgiving *you*, healing *you*, helping *you* in every trouble. So, my friends, how will you respond? In response to your Savior's uncommon mercy, let your life be an uncommonly grateful life. Amen.