

## **“Ten Percent”**

**Sermon on Sunday, October 9, 2022**

**Dear church,**

We might call this “Leprosy Sunday,” if it didn’t sound so bad! The stories from the Book of Kings and Luke align in that way, the disease at the center of each healing narrative. For a long time, leprosy was feared in parts of the world, a life changing disease that isolated sufferers in severe ways. In Jesus’ day there were colonies of lepers. Sufferers were kept in permanent quarantine. And while we don’t hear much about this here in our hemisphere, nature always competes with medicine and comes up with new diseases and mutations that challenge public health. We know all too much about that, unfortunately. And severe diseases almost always isolate people. Covid is just the latest example. During the first year of Covid and even into 2021, it isolated people in hospitals and Special Care Nursing units. Spouses and children had limited if any access to loved ones under the strictest pandemic rules. And so, we can relate a little bit to the fate of the ten individuals featured in the gospel of Luke, their desperation, their desire to get well, their sense of being abandoned. They had no vaccination option and no drugs to combat their condition. They only had this: “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

Little did they know that this was the easier part of their healing journey. Jesus didn’t need to be convinced. But reading this story, we may also wonder: did he do anything? He sent them to the priests to be examined. The priests functioned as the local board of medicine in those times. They had the authority to declare a person clean or healed. And: all ten men are miraculously cleared of their disease. No healing technique is applied in this story, no laying on of hands, no special prayer, no magic formula, no cleansing water, no medicine, no ritual. This healing is very Protestant, it turns out: it relies on Faith Alone. But tell me, who has the faith in this story? Toward the end, Jesus tells the Samaritan that “Your faith has made you well.” Interesting, to say the least. This had to be a teaching moment. What faith had the Samaritan shown?

I always took that to mean that we are only truly whole when we acknowledge and gratefully embrace the blessings we are given in life. People who practice gratitude are healthier people, happier people, says even more recent research about mental health. But then this story also implies that true gratitude isn't all that common. I always joke that this is the ten percent rule. Only ten percent return to give thanks. And some of you may take issue with that and say, "That's a bit harsh. Most of us are pretty good with our thank-you notes. Our kids? Yeah, we must force them sometimes to say, 'thank you,' but we do that. That's how we were raised." I am not arguing with you. I suggest that the Samaritan's act of kneeling before Jesus in prayerful gratitude is a gesture that points at a deeper flow of healing gratitude in his life. It may mean that from that day on this person lived with a true inner sense of being blessed. Someone had given him a second chance for life. And he accepted it with gratitude. The other part of the truth is: more people squander those chances. The sense of new-found freedom and gratitude is often short lived, and people return to their old ways of get trapped again in some way. It happens quite often in my experience.

Then you have other folks whose life wounds are so filled gratitude that they bring healing to others. Last week a person told me, "This church saved me." Trust me, she did not mean this in any religious or born-again Christian sort of way. Not at all. She came here as a train wreck, isolated from her true self and found a community that valued honesty and compassion, no non-sense. She got sober. "I have been sober for 36 years now," she said. "This church saved me." She didn't mean the church community. She didn't mean the people of St. Peter's, but it doesn't matter. See, the fact that the church is here and can offer those types of programs has the power to save people's lives. This person has not become a member of this church and probably won't. But when her time comes, she wants to have a service not just in any funeral home, but here in this place and if I'm here at that time, I will give it to her. "This church saved my life." How many of us could say that?

I also sense in her and in others that I have met in our AA programs a sense of gratitude and a commitment to service that has fueled their roads to recovery, their new way of life,

their healing. I was curious about the estimated success rate based on data. I was wondering whether it is in fact higher than 10 % in AA. And it looks like it is higher, even though it's always hard to interpret the data. I'm not a data analyst but I found that about 30% of regulars at AA meetings have been sober for more than 10 years. That's significant. Houses of Worship are the most popular and often also cheapest places where these support groups meet and where healing and recovery takes place over long periods of time. Thank you for supporting your church.

I have one more idea for a sermon title now that we are at the end of my reflection. We could call it, "Gratitude heals." That doesn't sound so cool. But gratitude is one of the invisible healing portions of life. No insurance required. No co-pay. Just the grace of God working through you.

**Amen.**