

Uncommon Mercy Leads to Uncommon Gratitude

Some things you don't see every day: 1. a dwarf blue sheep (there are only about two hundred in existence), 2. William Shakespeare's original autograph (there are only six known copies), and 3. an original Double Eagle \$20 gold coin (*there is only one left, which is privately owned and is worth more than seven million dollars*).

All of those things are extremely rare. They are uncommon. This morning, as we begin a new sermon **series on gratitude**, we are going to see two other things we don't see every day: **1. uncommon mercy** and **2. uncommon gratitude**. This is found in God's word in Luke 17:11-19. [*Read text.*]

1. Uncommon Mercy

In our Gospel reading, we find Jesus beginning his last, long journey to Jerusalem. There he will be rejected by his people. There he will suffer and die for the sins of the world. There he will rise in victory on the 3rd day.

As Jesus heads south to Jerusalem, he comes to a village near the border between Galilee and Samaria. Just as he is about to enter the village, ten men suffering from leprosy call out to him from a distance.

Leprosy is not as common today. Cases in the United States are rare. (*About 200 cases a year in the US. 90% are among immigrants.*) Leprosy has been eradicated in many parts of the world; it is not something you see every day.

But in Jesus' day, it was more common. In Jesus' day, a person who suffered from leprosy would be forced to live far away from other people in what were called leper colonies. There they would slowly die a painful death.

These lepers, though, had heard about Jesus. From a distance they yell out to him. Because one of the first places leprosy attacks is the vocal chords, it might have been hard for them to yell. And yet just imagine these men with scratchy voices crying out, "**Jesus, Master, have pity on us!**" (Luke 17:13).

The people in the crowd and the disciples heard the cries of the lepers. Some of them probably wished that they would just go away. Others felt pity for the terrible situation of these men, but what could they do? Even the doctors were helpless to cure these men.

Into this sad and hopeless situation Jesus inserts himself. Remember, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die. The weight of the world was on his shoulders. He had very important things to do. But that didn't stop him from helping these 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. In those days, that was unheard of. Lepers were believed contagious. They were also ceremonially unclean. They could not go to the temple to worship. No one would go near them, let alone touch them. But that didn't stop Jesus.

On this day he told the ten lepers to show themselves to the priest. In those days, the priest was the one who would declare a person clean from leprosy. The priest would declare that person able to return to family, worship at the temple, and rejoin life in society. On the way to the priest, Jesus miraculously healed them. He changed their lives. He gave them a new life—a new beginning. The mercy he showed them was uncommon.

Do you see what has happened. God has come and inserted himself in this sad and hopeless world. He brings hope and joy with a touch, with a word.

Our world can be called “sad and hopeless” not just because people are sick and miserable with different kinds of diseases. Death itself brings great sadness, but it is not the main source of hopelessness. Misery and death are just symptoms of the real sadness and hopelessness. Our real problem is that we sin against God. For example we don't always show compassion for the sick and suffering as we should. We don't always take time to help someone who needs our help. Our rebellion not only brings misery and death. It brings God's anger and eternal separation from him in hell.

We see uncommon mercy as God inserts himself into our world and becomes one of us. Jesus had come to earth on a mission of mercy. He was headed to Jerusalem to complete that mission.

Remember what Jesus was about to do. He was about to suffer the punishment, the pain, the hell we deserve for our sins. In his miracles he showed that he wasn't just a good man who would suffer for us, but he was the perfect Son of God. God was punished so we could be forgiven. Uncommon mercy.

We are told one man came back and was, “**praising God with a loud voice.**” There are ways to show gratitude and one way is to give thanks in worship. We do not know that the man used Scripture or words from a worship service to do this. Whatever words he used, he was compelled to give thanks in words to Jesus.

Jesus has shown uncommon mercy to you and me. We can praise and thank him. One way, it is not the only way, is to come to worship and to use the words that are here to say “thanks” to Jesus. As the pastor pronounces forgiveness, you can say “*Thank you.*” in word and song. As the Scriptures are being read and you hear of your blessings, you can silently say, “*Thank you.*” You can offer your own prayers of “thanks” during the offering or even as pastor is speaking during the sermon and you feel thankful. We can also count our blessings at home and on the road and offer thanks. Jesus has blessed us with salvation. He has given us healing and many other blessings. For his uncommon mercy, we show our gratitude.

2. Uncommon Gratitude

As we study this event we see something that is uncommon besides Jesus’ mercy. One of the 10 lepers shows uncommon gratitude. This is something worth noting.

After Jesus told the lepers to show themselves to the priest, all ten of the lepers left. Can't you just picture what it must have been like as the lepers went to the priest? They noticed their joints no longer hurt. Their skin cleared up. Their voices returned. They were healed. Can't you just see them pick up the pace and begin to run? But 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 healed from a painful, debilitating disease. Maybe some even considered going back to thank Jesus. But you can see how they could get too caught up in their homecoming celebrations and the excitement of their new lives.

How often doesn't that happen to us? The Lord gets us out of the hospital, he gets us that job, that school we want our kids to enrolled in. We say, “*Thank you.*” in a quick prayer. We tell ourselves, “*I am going to show my gratitude in my actions.*” But then a couple of hours pass. We get busy with our lives. Nothing significantly changes.

We are thankful people. However, if we want to show thankfulness, even uncommon gratitude, we need to go the feet of our Savior as the one leper did. At the feet of Jesus we find a word of forgiveness for our failures to properly show thanks. At the feet of Jesus we find a word of encouragement that he will go with us and help us to not only say “*Thank you.*” but to live it. Close to a hundred years ago the church in West Salem, WI needed a bell for

its steeple. My great-grandfather, without telling his wife, ordered a bell from the bell makers in London, England for the sum of \$500 American dollars. The bell was cast and then shipped by boat to the U.S. and made its way to western Wisconsin. Unfortunately, my great grandfather passed away before the bell was placed in the steeple. They rigged it up on the ground and rang it anyway for his funeral. Today that price would have been \$11,000 or more. It was an uncommon gift from a common man. He didn't because of his love for Jesus who had shown him mercy.

I am not telling you this story so you can be inspired to do something unique. I certainly wouldn't want you do something without your spouse's approval. I only tell you the story to point out that sometimes the Lord's uncommon mercy does cause people to show uncommon gratitude.

I would also point out that you are a unique person and a unique Christian. I would argue that not just the uncommon things you do for the Lord that are unique, but I believe that the common things you do are special, because they are uniquely from you and no one else. Jesus values your cleaning up a mess at home when no one else wants to do it. Jesus values dads and mom going the extra mile and spending the extra hour to help their family and their church.

It isn't easy to show gratitude. You need to revisit the uncommon mercy your Savior has shown you. Every moment of his life he showed love. He helped. He healed. He did that because you would so often fail to love and help and heal. In your life he continues to show you love you don't deserve, forgiving you, healing you, helping you in every trouble. In response to your Savior's uncommon mercy to you, live an uncommonly grateful life. Amen.