

“Grace and Gratitude”

Luke 17:11-19; Psalm 107:1-9

November 23, 2025/Stewardship Sunday

1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

I. Introduction Stories

Grace and gratitude. Grace and...gratitude. Not gratitude and grace. But grace and gratitude. I think the order is important.

I remember a commercial. I saw it on television a while ago. It's by Amazon. It's called "Moving Day." And like all good commercials, it tells a story.

The story begins with a single mom and her teenage son. They have lived in a city. It's urban. There are buildings and people and cars. And most importantly, there are sidewalks. And on the sidewalks the teenage boy skateboarded. He skateboarded with his friends. That's what they do. That's a big part of their friendship; how they connect. But he's leaving that; sidewalks, skateboards and friends. His friends are there to see him off. They hug on the sidewalk. He then gets the car with his mom. It's filled with moving boxes. And he's off. It's "moving day."

And the new home, well, it's on a beach. The young man's new bedroom is filled with boxes to unpack. But he goes outside. Maybe to meet new friends; to connect. But there are no sidewalks. There're just sand and some short boardwalks. And there are no friends. He tries to skateboard here and there. But skateboarding doesn't work; it's the sand. So the young man comes home and throws his skateboard down. He's alone. The move is not going well. And his mom has been watching.

So his mom has an idea. She goes online and orders something. A box appears the next day. It's from Amazon, of course. The box is good sized. We wonder what it is. She opens it. It's a short surfboard; a wave board. In next scene we see her teenage son out in the water with the wave board learning to surf with new friends. He's all smiles. Concrete has become water. Sidewalks have become waves. He gives a wave to his mom. It's his way of saying "Thanks." She waves back and smiles. The story is told in 30 seconds. Grace and gratitude.

Grace and gratitude. Sometimes we don't see the grace at the time. I think of a country song by Garth Brooks, "Unanswered Prayer." It too is a story, a story in song. Brooks sings:

“Just the other night, at a hometown football game /My wife and I, ran into my old high school flame
And as I introduced them, the past came back to me/ And I couldn't help but think, of the way things used to be

She was the one, that I'd wanted for all times/Each night I'd spend prayin', that God
would make her mine
And if he'd only grant me this wish, I wished back then/I'd never ask for anything, again

Sometimes, I thank God, for unanswered prayers/Remember, when you're talkin' to the
man upstairs

And just because, he doesn't answer, doesn't mean he don't care/Some of God's greatest
gifts, are unanswered prayers

She wasn't quite the angel, that I remembered in my dreams/And I could tell, that time
had changed me/In her eyes too, it seemed

We tried to talk about the old days/There wasn't much, we could recall/I guess the Lord
knows what he's doin', after all

And as she walked away, and I looked at my wife/And then and there, I thanked the good
Lord/For the gifts, in my life

Sometimes, I thank God, for unanswered prayers/Remember, when you're talkin' to the
man upstairs

That just because he may not answer, doesn't mean he don't care/Some of God's greatest
gifts, are unanswered prayers

Hmm? Something to think about. Grace and gratitude. Sometimes that grace is disguised,
like an unanswered prayer. And it's only with 20/20 hindsight that we see it and say "thanks."

Grace and gratitude. Next Thursday is Thanksgiving. And next Sunday is the 1st Sunday
of Advent. The Advent and Christmas seasons are upon us. And for some people, me included,
that means it's the season to watch Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed in "It's a Wonderful Life."
In the movie Jimmy Stewart is Georgy Bailey and has dreams of traveling the world and
becoming an architect to build skyscrapers. They are big dreams. Dreams beyond his small town
of Bedford Falls. But things don't work out. Instead, unfortunate circumstances overcome his
life, and he finds himself running his dad's savings and loan business as his younger brother and
friends go on to live their dreams.

Things "come to a head" when money is misplaced during a bank audit. The lost dreams
of success and threat of jail time take George Bailey to a bridge. He ponders jumping, believing
the world would be better off without him. It's then that his guardian angel Clarence appears.
And Clarence shows him what the world would be like if George Bailey had never been born
and lived his life. And time after time George sees that small acts of kindness and courage make
a big difference in people's lives. And he has impacted many lives. George comes to know that
even when dreams don't come to be, it is still "A Wonderful Life."

"It's a Wonderful Life" came out in 1947. It has certainly stood the test of time. It
reminds us that our lives are valuable, and that worth is not based on fleeting things like money
and popularity and status. George Bailey reminds us that with generosity and kindness we share
God's grace with others, just as others have graced our lives. And it is in this grace that we are

“the richest people in town.” It is a wonderful life. And when we see that we give thanks, like George Bailey.

II. Biblical Texts and Brief Discussion

Grace and gratitude. That’s the theme of Psalm 107 read earlier. It’s a hymn of thanksgiving and praise. And the Psalm begins with grace, God’s grace. Specifically, it invites worshippers to ponder the “steadfast love” of God. The Hebrew word is “hesed.” It means the faithfulness of God who acts to save.

And the invitation to sing is to those who have known “trouble.” And who hasn’t known trouble at some point in life? And the “redeemed” are those who see God’s salvation in their lives. The redeemed are those who found themselves in a distant land far from worship and the temple and familiar culture. But the distance is not just physical distance. It is also moral and spiritual distance; the deserts we can find ourselves in far from God and life and hope. Perhaps it’s a bad choice. Or perhaps something bad has happened. And we find ourselves far from God.

But like the shepherd in Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep, God leaves the 99 to find the 1 who is lost. It is the “hesed” of God, the loving kindness of God, that saves us in many different ways. Once wandering in a desert lost, God finds us and brings us home. It is grace.

And the response to grace is gratitude. It’s saying “thanks.” It’s singing “thanks.” It’s living “thanks.” “O, give thanks to the Lord” the Psalm says (Ps. 107:1). It’s gratitude to God.

Grace and gratitude. That brings us to our story in Luke 17. Look for grace, and the gratitude. **Read Luke 17:11-19.**

Grace and gratitude. What we have here are really two stories. The first is a healing story. The second is a salvation story. There is grace in both, but gratitude in only one. And it makes a difference.

In the first story, 10 lepers live outside of town. They live in isolation due to their disease. They also live along a main road so to ask for charity. When they see travelers approaching their first thought was probably to ask for alms. But when they see it’s Jesus maybe they thought to ask for more. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” In grace Jesus responds to their need. All 10 are healed. It’s grace. And as was the custom, they were to be checked out by a priest in the temple. Once declared “officially clean” they could return to their lives with their families and friends. Healing was a powerful act of grace.

We then get the second story. It’s a salvation story. One of the 10 lepers was a Samaritan. So not only was he a marginalized outcast because of his leprosy, he was also an outcast because of ethnicity and religion. However, despite all that, or maybe because of all that, he is the only one to return and give thanks. God’s grace has included him, a double outcast. And he is filled with gratitude. As the other 9 head to the temple to be deemed “officially clean” so to return to their lives, this 1 Samaritan will stay a little longer, express gratitude, and meet Jesus. It’s the outsider of the outsiders who sees the grace and returns gratitude. And in the end Jesus says, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well” (Lk. 17:19). The Greek word for

“made well” is “so/dzo.” It means “to save.” Not only has the Samaritan been healed, but he has returned in gratitude, believed, met Jesus, and was saved. He knows and believes in Jesus. The outsider became the insider. It was grace and gratitude. And so it invites us to wonder how often grace touches people’s lives, but they miss the Giver. Gratitude matters.

III. Brief Theological Reflection

Grace and gratitude. It’s a mother’s gift and the wave of her son. It’s answered and unanswered prayers. It’s discovering again the grace in kindness and generosity and friendship. It’s grace that finds you when you’re lost, and grace that heals and saves.

Today is Stewardship Sunday and Thanksgiving Sunday. They go together. God acts first in grace. Sometimes it’s a big surprise. Often it’s quieter. And our response can be, should be, gratitude. Generous stewardship is a way to say “thanks.” Grace and gratitude. When we put them together, we come to discover again and again, “it’s a wonderful life.”