

TURN BACK

There are lots of things for which to be thankful.
Having a car or truck to get to church sure beats walking, and it's a good thing they have windows and a roof.

Even so, sometimes we do walk, so we can be thankful for Shoes.
They're great to have, especially in the winter.
There are so many things worthy of thanksgiving.

Breath mints: I know we are all thankful for them.
I imagine you're thankful the preacher showed up today.
Okay,.....at least you're thankful for the piano player and for Sarah turning on the heat.

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If we stop and think about it: we take a lot of things for granted.

Our world / our lifestyle is complicated, and we just assume most of the pieces will fit together and the systems will work.  
Lights "should" go on when the switch is flipped.  
It's just the way things are suppose to be.

And more often than not, instead of being thankful when stuff works, we tend to get annoyed when they don't,... and that's telling.

Still, we are not hunters and gathers. We plan ahead. We own things. We have possessions that serve us.  
We invest in our complex system that is designed to satisfy our demands.  
For ex. Turkey's come cleaned, plucked and in a plastic wrap.  
~ I wonder how that happens.???? (put your hand down Kevin).

It doesn't matter,.....because there are other issues to tend to.... there are other concerns that draw our focus  
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Could it be that our expectations are based more on the need for certainty and are the by-products of our investments?

When we believe that we control outcomes and when we demand a defined result, then there is little room for sincere thankfulness.

For ex., why should I be thankful that my car works when I paid for a reliable, dependable vehicle? It's suppose to work!

Blending control and a sense of entitlement diminishes the surprise and delight of being, from the heart, thankful. We've constructed our lives to avoid gratitude. Control and entitlement make it hard to be thankful.

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Today's passages deal with both of those aspects.

However, before we look at the passages, it is fair and logical to ponder: "Why should I be thankful?"  
"Aside from politeness and baiting others to do more desirable things, **why be thankful?**"

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Naaman was a powerful man. He was the commander of an army.

He controlled people and the destiny of people.

Yet, he had a serious problem. He had a terrible skin disease, assumed to be leprosy.

Leprosy is a bacterial infection that attacks many parts of the body, and as it progresses, skin lesions and joint disfiguration become visibly sign of the disease's manifestation.

Subsequently, people with skin diseases were thought to have leprosy, and so they were avoided and considered "unclean" and unsafe.

That stigma was bad enough, but the infection could also become quite painful.

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In his turmoil, a child / an Israelite slave girl told him that there was a prophet in Samaria, Elisha, who could heal him.

*People with terrible ailments tend to reach out to any possible cure.*

*Some will travel 1/2 way around the world to receive an radical procedure,.... in the hope that it will save them..*

Desperation can override "control".

She told him that the Yahweh prophet could cure him, but he had to go to Elisha. And, that was what Naaman wanted to do.

So, he convinced his King to send him to the land of Israel to meet the prophet for Yahweh.

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A royal letter was written for the King of Israel to allow this feared, General safe passage, and with it a fortune of garments, silver and gold were sent to appease the Israelite King, too.

Powerful leaders understand legal documents and diplomatic enticements; however, they tend to be uncomfortable with matters of trust and faith.

The Israelite King became very anxious about the deal / the arrangement. He feared it was a setup / a rouse to justify attacking him after the prophet Elisa failed.

Living by certainty expels most notions of faith.

The Israelite King must have thought: How in the world could Elisha cure leprosy?

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Nevertheless, Elisha believed,..... and persuaded his King to allow Naaman to come to his place, and so Naaman travelled to Elisha's house.

Naaman arrived at Elisha's house with the grandeur of an entourage with horses and chariots--a powerful display it had to have been.

Proper protocol dictated that Elisha should meekly present himself to such a dignitary, but instead, Elisha sent out a messenger to give Naaman the prescription to cure him. This was step one: you're not in control.

Step two: Naaman was instructed to wash 7 times in the Jordan river to be healed. Naaman was furious.

He yelled out, "I assumed this great prophet would come before me, chant lofty and glorious things to his God, and then his God would appear and cure me. That's how it's suppose to happen. I'm entitled to that. Plus, the Jordan river is a slow dull river. It's usually muddy. I'd much rather use one of the fine rivers we have back home. I choose one of those rivers."

~All symptomatic words from one who needs to be in control. Moreover, this would not be a contest for him to win. He needed to lose.

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Fortunately for Naaman, a servant reasons with him and dares him to give it a try. Yielding power to Elisha, releasing his need for control, and tossing a hint of faith to Elisha's God, Naaman washes 7 times in the Jordan R. Naaman returned to Elisha's home, but this time he came humbly and thankfully,..... because his skin was restored to a youthful condition. He was clean,..... in more ways than one.

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With Elisha standing With him, Naaman gave thanks to Yahweh by declaring that NOT only was Elisha's God--Yahweh "The" God, but Yahweh was the Only God.

Afterwards, Naaman had become a free man: free from leprosy, free from controlling everything, free from trying to be his own Lord and free to trust,.....not only God, but also others. His journey to healing included learning to trust people--to be grateful. With trust and a touch of faith, he discovered Yahweh and healing.

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Another leper story. This one has 10 lepers / people thought to have leprosy.

Jesus was travelling south, leaving Samaria, and passed through a village where 10 lepers approached him. They carefully kept their distance, as was required of lepers, and so they had to yell, to Jesus, their plea for help. They believed Jesus could help them, so they asked for his mercy; moreover, their word for Master has an endearing connotation. They were respectfully and intimately petitioning Jesus.

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Their unfortunate appearance revealed to Jesus their misfortune. In response, Jesus simply told them to go and show themselves to the local priests.

~This wasn't a nasty trick to expose the priest to leprosy, nor was Jesus merely sending them away.

Once a person is cured from a disease, that person is obligated to have a priest inspect them to make sure,... to receive the "all clear" / to be declared "Clean."

Once "Clean", a person could socialize normally and go to the temple, too.

Therefore, they understood / they believed that somehow / someway they would be cured by the time they came to the priests.

They believed, obeyed and went to find a priest.

~If they knew their Scriptures, they were likely relieved that they didn't have to go and bathe in the muddy Jordan River.

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On their way, they became clean / cured.

Nine continued, as instructed, to do as the law required.

~I wonder if they had a sense of entitlement? Perhaps thinking, "Finally, God decides to cure us? What took God so long?"

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One of the ten, engaged in life differently.

He turned back / he changed his journey / he turned back to personally thank Jesus and give praise to God.

Jesus was surprised and disappointed that the other nine continued in their old ways of strict obedience to the law.

They didn't SEE the person / the man in the process.

They didn't see / recognize the Christ.

This story was a lesson for the Jews,... and for us.

The nine chose the controlled path and the path of entitlement.

They were cured, after all, and so they deserved to be declared clean and acceptable. The priest had a duty to label them "clean."

Being healed wasn't enough,..... and gratitude to the person who granted them the cure wasn't important to them either.

The Samaritan would have been familiar with such customs and expectations; however, he wasn't a slave to them.

He was open to surprise..... and gratitude.

He rejoiced / he was overwhelmed with his healing,..... and he turned back to thank the person responsible.

He didn't HAVE to do anything. He chose to thank Jesus,..... and was blessed by Jesus.

The One Samaritan found true healing--spiritual healing.

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So, what's the big deal about being thankful,..... and being thankful is a bit more involved than conjuring up a "thankful" list when prompted.

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Embracing thanksgiving / being thanksgiving is freeing, inspiring and more.

Thankful living is releasing the need for certainty and control.

It is being free from most of the heavy burdens of expectations,..which are laden with disappointments, too.

Thankful living doesn't invest heavily in predictable outcomes, but instead is open to surprise and delight.

It's trusting a slave girl and an unseen prophet and washing 7 times in a muddy river,..... just because...something rings true.

In addition, thankfulness is more than expressing gratitude. It is being in right relationships with others and God.

Thankful living is honesty and freedom.

By saying thank-you from the heart, we release our ownership, our power, our sense of entitlement and by so doing, we confess we Needed the help / we needed the gift/ we.....Needed the person..... and we need God.

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Naaman's story teaches us to let go of control and expectations.

The story in Luke instructs us to turn back..... and have a good look.

It is a lesson about Turning back and looking / seeing how we got here,..... right now.

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God usually works through people.

God poured self out in a very special way, through Jesus.

However, God's Spirit flows through many people.

God is active in the world: active bringing healing, redemption, love and grace.....through individuals to individuals.

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Look back,.....Do YOU see Christ?

Look back and see who surprised you / who blessed you / who shocked you to consider a new idea ...a new way.

Look back and smile, we didn't get here on our own. Thanks be to God,.....and to so many others, too.

Thankfully, we are not very powerful, alone.