17th Sunday after Trinity Askham Richard and LM Tockwith (harvest) 2025.

Last week I preached about the need to be doing all we do within our lives not for thanks but for knowing we do God’s will. That even when we do all that we do, we are in fact only doing God’s will, and all that God gives us is his thanks to us. We sadly live in an entitlement culture, where most people feel the need to be thanked for everything they do, and sadly within church communities this can be the same. On the face of it the Gospel reading this morning can seem to feed in this need for thanks, when Jesus asks ‘were not ten made clean? But the other nine where are they?’ However, Jesus is not asking this question because he wants thanks for the cleaning and healing of the ten lepers, he wanted them to return and ‘give praise to God’. A God from where comes all good things.

All of the readings today are telling us that through prayer we need to be talking to God and thanking him for all we have and when we do something in his name we’re not doing it in search of thanks or reward, we are doing it because we know it is the right thing to do.

For all his wealth and finery, for all those who would have been employed to look after him, the illness Naaman has contracted is spotted by someone who lived in his household, someone whom he would probably never have noticed, but the young servant girl who spotted the tell tale signs of leprosy, is the one who perhaps saves his life. She was a slave from Israel and after seeing the tell-tale signs of leprosy she told Naaman that her Lord would be able to cure him of this disease. We don’t hear of this little girl being rewarded at the end of the healing, we do hear about Elisha being thanked and rewarded for his part in the healing, although the main thanks goes to God when Naaman finally went and stood before Elisha and said ‘now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.’

Naaman had arrived laden with gifts of silver and gold to pay for his cure, but Elisha had the nerve not to even open the door to Naaman but sends a messenger to tell Naaman that to cure his leprosy all he had to do was wash himself seven times in the River Jordan.

Naaman had expected to have to do terrible things and pay lots of money for his treatment, but no, Elisha had not even welcomed him in the way he had expected and had also not given him the cure that he expected. It’s just like when people go to the doctors knowing what they want to help them get better, they want pills, surgery, physio, acupuncture and so on. But sometimes all the doctor wants to prescribe is rest, a change in lifestyle, a change in eating habit, a change in, or perhaps to, a fitness regime. Pills are what we expect and wouldn’t question, the other changes perhaps would take a lot more persuasion for us to adhere to, we might even have to change our lifestyle to get better and that’s hard work; popping a pill or two is so much easier. Note the news this week that two and half million people in this country are now taking the weight lost drugs. Having a jab or popping a pill is much easier than a change ion lifestyle.

Naaman finally succumbs to the wise words of Elisha and went down to the river and did as Elisha had said.

When he realises that he is cured, he returns humbly and gratefully to Elisha, the man of the Israeli God. Namaan does not resent Elisha in the fact that he didn’t come out and bow down at his feet, he accepted Elisha’s rebuke and recognised what it meant, ‘Now I know’, he says, ‘that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel’.

If Elisha had laid his hands on Naaman or had given him more time or attention then perhaps Naaman would have worshipped Elisha for being cured and would not have recognised his cure as coming from God.

And the same thing happens with the 10 lepers in the story from St. Luke’s Gospel. Unlike in previous stories Jesus does not touch the lepers. Neither does he say or do anything to directly cleanse the leprosy, but he just tells them to go off and show themselves to the priests. And as they went they were made clean. The one who came back was told by Jesus that it was his faith which had made him clean, Jesus hadn’t done it, he had only instructed what they should do; it was their faith in God which had cleansed them all. Jesus gave the man power over his own life, teaches us that it is always up to us as an individual to come closer to God and not to rely on others to make that relationship happen.

Jesus could have lauded it over the lepers, he could have taken all the plaudits for what happened, but he wanted to instil in them, and wants to instil in us, that actually it is our faith, our actions, our relationship with God which is important. And to the leper who had been castigated by everyone else, who would have lived on the edge of society, who would have had to survive on handouts and charity, this sudden realisation that he could now control his own life because he had had faith in God must have been overpowering and yet humbling.

As Naaman and the lepers found out, all that is required to get nearer to God is a small bit of obedience, to fulfil little tasks, to have a faith which costs nothing but to put aside the great weight of our sometimes pathetic pride. How much better life would be if we could only open our hearts and lives to whatever God wants for us. As we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, thy will be done, we are saying to God that we will follow His lead and not demand to have our own way. When we feel that we need a favour, we need help, we must ask for it with prayer and thanksgiving, because God answers prayer, even if it is not always in the precise way we expect or want.

Yet to do this may be the hardest, although perhaps the simplest, thing we will ever do. These might just be the things, though, which make it possible to join Naaman in four simple words of praise, ‘Now I know God’. But to do this we need to see through the human who might be helping and see the God who is part of their life, who is now helping you; and when you do get to know God, be thankful, and through that thanks share your peace, joy and love with others just as others have done with you.