

## Smiling at Rice – based on Luke 17:11-19

Aspen Community UMC

October 14, 2007

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Today's reading gets us to thinking about healing, but even more than that,  
it gets us thinking about gratitude.

Ten people were cured of a terrible disease  
before we learned how to prevent it.

Jesus healed ten men,  
and then told them to run ahead and show themselves to the priests.

The priests were the doctors at that time, the medical people.  
The Levite priests had been given the formula for Moses' anointing oil.

They mixed the healing oils, what we now call essential oils.

In a way, they were pharmacists too.

So, it would make sense that Jesus would tell the men whom he had just cured  
of their disease, to go ahead and be checked out by the professionals.

And they go – but one man returns to say "thank you."

So, what happens to him? What is so significant about his returning to say "thanks?"

Jesus tells him,

"Your faith has made you whole."

But, nothing had been said about faith.

Faith and gratitude must be related to one another.

Perhaps faith and gratitude are the same thing.

There is something to think about.

Today I want to share some ideas about gratitude -  
first, from an empirical perspective,  
then from the subjective experience of others,  
and finally as a principle that has been around for a long time.

Let's look at the empirical side of it.

Is anyone curious about "Smiling at Rice"  
and why I have titled this message "Smiling at Rice?"

This image comes from the book *The Hidden Message in Water* by Masaru Emoto.

Dr. Emoto was fascinated with water, has done a lot of research with water.

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He began photographing water and water as it froze to become ice crystals,  
water in all kinds of places.

How many of you have seen these pictures?

Water from peaceful places, clear streams, or water in the presence  
of beautiful music, forms ice crystals - beautiful ice crystals.

But, water subject to chaotic conditions and pollution often does not form crystals at all.

Or such water took on molecular shapes that had no symmetry.

Water was exposed to words –  
words of thanks and words of criticism or hate.

Water appears to respond  
to emotion, to tone, to thinking and feeling.

Now for the rice.

Emoto tells us about an experiment done by a family who knew of his work.

They put cooked rice in two glass jars, and every day for a month  
said “thank you” to one jar and “you fool” to the other.

Then they tracked how the rice changed over time.

When the children got home from school,  
they would speak these words to the jars of rice.

After a month, the rice that was told “thank you”  
started to ferment, with a mellow smell like that of malt.

While the rice that was exposed to, “you fool” rotted and turned black.

Other people did the experiment.

They had similar results.

One family tried a variation.

Like the others, they said “thank you” to the first bottle of rice.

and they said, “you fool” to the second bottle of rice.

These people prepared a third bottle of rice that they simply ignored.

What do you think happened?

The rice that was ignored actually rotted before the rice that was exposed to “you fool.”

It seems that being ridiculed is actually not as damaging as being ignored. <sup>1</sup>

Does rice have something to tell us?

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I believe that rice has something to say to us,  
and I like to remind myself about it with the phrase smiling at rice.

I give that image to you today.

There is an energy, something happens of a physical nature  
when infused with gratitude – when exposed, perhaps to love.  
Do we know this? Do we think it might be accurate? Or do we think not?

Some of you may have read or watched The Secret.

The Secret is a DVD movie edited by Rhonda Byrne.

So popular that it was made into a CD, then a book.

It was not produced by a major movie studio,  
but it caught on a year or two ago – and many have seen it.  
It all got out by word of mouth until Oprah featured its author  
and some of the people who were part of it.

It's about something that's been around a long time,  
and it's called the law of attraction.

The law of attraction is all about gratitude  
but from a standpoint of what we would now know as quantum physics.  
It is about a kind of energy that is said to draw to us what we picture, what we believe.  
Not necessarily what we want, or think we want, but what we think and feel.

There is a statement in The Secret by Wallace Wattles.

Wallace Wattles lived in the late 1800's so he was writing about a hundred years ago.

He wrote, "Gratitude brings your whole mind  
into closer harmony  
with the creative energies of the Universe."

Let's take a look back at our scripture.

We have ten lepers who want to be healed. Jesus heals them.

He tells them to go to the local priest – the medical people -  
to be checked out. They go.

And one of the men comes back to Jesus and expresses  
what – his gratitude.

Jesus tells him that he is now "whole."

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Jesus tells him, "Your faith has made you whole."  
He is not only cured from his disease, he is healed, or whole.

This man got something else -  
and it came to him because of his gratitude.

"Gratitude brings your whole mind  
into closer harmony  
with the creative energies of the universe."

He also said, "Many people who order their lives rightly in all other ways  
are kept in poverty by their lack of gratitude."<sup>2</sup>

I'm learning, not just from him, that  
gratitude is a very powerful force in the universe.

The DVD movie is a presentation of person after person,  
who discovered something that was so powerful  
it propelled most of them  
to greatness for their contributions to the world,  
and for many - great material wealth.

It was an exploration of what she discovered as -  
the law of attraction –

or perhaps we might also call it the phenomena of gratitude, of expectation, of faith.

Is it positive thinking? Sure it is. And, it is more.

Is it the kind of thing we talk about as faith?

Sounds like it from our reading today.

Huston Smith has a new book called *The Soul of Christianity: Restoring the Great Tradition*.

He explores some things that were lost from the early years of Christianity  
before Christianity became entrenched in the Roman church  
with the growing power and authority of a religious organization  
that acted as if it were a nation.

Huston Smith looks at the historical Jesus, before the church,  
telling us that Jesus was part of a tradition of Spirit-filled teachers, or mediators.

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There is plenty of evidence that Jesus  
drew power from something – and Smith calls it the spirit world.

He also says that science has hopefully outgrown  
the “modern mistake” of discounting invisible realities.

Physicists now know that the energy in one cubic centimeter of empty space  
is greater than the energy of all the matter in the known universe.<sup>3</sup>

Science, theology, thinking in general, is closing in  
on some important learning - and part of it –  
I want to suggest - is connected with love and with gratitude.

Does this say anything to us? Of course it does.

It encourages us to live  
inviting and expecting the good, for in doing that,  
lays the power to manifest that very thing in our lives.

Love has a power perhaps like no other  
substance in the universe –

And science is finally tracking it down.

I will tell you that as I have learned these things in the last few years  
prayer has taken on much greater meaning to me.

This is why, for me, our prayer time  
is the very center of our worship.

One other thing,

I think that our scripture today is a window into other ancient knowledge  
which I made reference to in Huston's Smith's words  
about Jesus coming from a tradition of spirit filled teachers.

This is body of knowledge and study generally known as the Wisdom traditions  
and, there are many of them – Christian, Jewish, Islamic.

It's not the generic sort of wisdom that comes with age and experience  
but something else.

The wisdom traditions are about  
spiritual transformation. They were the common ground of religions,

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the headwaters so to speak of the major religions.

People are getting more interested in these ancient studies and practices.

That new interest has not come from the church - as much as it has from science.

More and more people are stepping back into what Cynthia Bourgeault

would call those sacred roadmaps of wholeness

that have been around, sometimes hidden, for centuries.

Cynthia Bourgeault is an Episcopal priest who has written about

how Christianity especially in the west lost its wisdom.

She encourages us to reclaim the ancient traditions.<sup>4</sup>

Why? Because, reading the scripture through the eyes

of wisdom, or the wisdom tradition, helps us see more.

I think that our reading today is a window into that wisdom tradition.

If we look at it simply as a story about Jesus'

healing powers, we miss something.

Most teachers in the wisdom tradition will tell us

that the real source of wisdom lies in a more vivid realm

of divine consciousness that is neither behind us

nor ahead of us - but always surrounding us.

Jesus calls it the kingdom,

and he gives us a glimpse of it through stories like this.

Gratitude is part of the kingdom.

That may be why it has been illusive to us

in our very practical, linear ways of thinking.

Let's think about gratitude as a spiritual practice.

- a way of being in the world that goes beyond thank you notes,

and lists of things to be thankful for.

It is when we become aware of the beauty of our lives and in our lives.

It is when our hearts say "thank you" in reply."<sup>5</sup>

Back to the rice sitting on the counter -

waiting for our love, our hate, or our neglect.

How many things in our lives await our gratitude?

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And what about the man, cured of his disease,  
whose gratitude lead him back to Jesus to say “thank you?”  
Jesus told him that he was now whole.  
I wonder what his life was like after that?

And, when we are made whole – in the same way – when our hearts  
say thank you in reply - what will our lives be like?

I hope this reflection on the scripture,  
has been enriched by considering a little science,  
a popular movie,  
a few words on the history of Christianity,  
and a call back to the wisdom traditions  
as a way to transformation.

Because that is what the stories are about.  
So, I close with the question for us to ponder:  
When we are made whole – in the same way -  
when our hearts say thank you in reply – what will our lives be like?

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<sup>1</sup> Masaru Emoto. *The Hidden Messages of Water*. p. 65

<sup>2</sup> Rhonda Byrne. *The Secret*. p.77

<sup>3</sup> Huston Smith. *The Soul of Christianity*. p. 41

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault. *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart*.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Suzelle Lynch. Sermon: “Grateful Even for the Hard Stuff”