

Twenty-five years ago I sent Christie a card that we've kept all these years. It was back in the time when people made ice with ice trays in the freezer, and then dumped them out into a bowl. On the front of the card, a woman stands by her freezer holding an ice tray and with breathless wonder, tears of joy in her eyes, exclaims, "Dear God – Perfect Ice Cubes Again!" She's overcome with gratitude for the small miracle of frozen cubes.

In our gospel this morning we see a man overcome with gratitude, and for more than perfect ice cubes. In the story, ten lepers cry out to Jesus for mercy. He tells them to go show themselves to the priests, who will, if they are healed of their leprosy, declare them clean. On the way, all ten of the lepers find themselves healed of their leprosy.

But, only one man comes back to thank Jesus. He falls before the Lord and thanks Him. And Jesus says, "*Get up and go your way. Your faith has made you well.*" Ten healed, but only one made well. What is the difference between being healed and being made well?

The lepers who are healed are healed on the surface. Leprosy is a skin disease. They are externally healed. And this healing is good, obviously. It restores them to the greater community. It makes them feel better. It makes their lives better.

So in this passage I'm likening "healing" to having the components of your life in good order: good health, good relationships, meaningful work, creative outlets, restorative leisure. I think it's what people call "balance" and you can read articles about finding it in every magazine ever written.

I'm first in line for this kind of healing. I like when things go well in my life. I like "when my lines fall in pleasant places" as we read in the Psalms. I like when I have "balance." Who doesn't? But, life can change in an instant, can't it?

It is that phone call that you dread. It is the news that your job has been eliminated. Or it is the growing distance between you and your husband. Or your best friend, it turns out, has a drug problem. Or maybe there is nothing obviously "wrong" in the externals of your life, but you just can't seem to get up on Tuesday morning to put them all into balance.

It doesn't take much for me to lose my balance. As I said, I like balance, I'm all for balance; I eat a healthy breakfast in hopes that the day goes well! However, the expectation that life should be balanced all the time usually ends in disappointment or anger. A more realistic way to look at life would, in the words of the old song, be, "*I beg your pardon. I never promised you a rose garden.*"

Somehow though, I think most of us begin to expect a rose garden. We think life should go a certain way. We may even feel that we deserve for life to go well. And then

we act accordingly – we do all in our power to control our lives. We exert our will to maintain balance for ourselves. And if we achieve this balance, then we have no one to thank but ourselves. We look at our healed leprosy and go show ourselves acceptable to the priests, ready to get on with our balanced lives.

The ancient Greeks called this human condition “hubris” – being out of touch with reality while overestimating one’s own competence and power and importance. The Bible calls it the sin of pride. You and I might just call it “selfish.”

There’s even an outside chance that you might actually know someone who fits this description! My wife knows someone who, after enjoying the amazing dinner party she prepared entirely on her own, spent the last part of this past Friday evening drinking Scotch with the men while she cleaned up! I sure don’t want to meet that guy. And all my examples are obviously hypothetical anyway.

So let’s stop talking about me, and start talking about King Lear. I highly recommend Wendell Berry’s book “Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition.” By Modern Superstition, Berry means the hubristic notion that life is controlled and organized by human power. Berry says that he reads and rereads King Lear to remind him of what is true about life. He points to a pivotal scene involving the Earl of Gloucester and his loyal son Edgar.

Gloucester is guilty, like King Lear, of hubris, or the presumption of treating life as knowable, predictable and within his control. Both his eyes are gouged out in retribution for his loyalty to King Lear. He has falsely accused and driven away Edgar, his loyal son. Edgar assumes the role of a madman. Gloucester wants to kill himself; Edgar, disguised as a madman, leads his blind father to the edge of a cliff, which is not a cliff at all. Gloucester, thinking that he is about to take control of his life by ending it, “*falls forward and swoons.*”

When Gloucester returns to consciousness, he is dismayed to find himself still alive. Edgar pretends to be a passerby at the bottom of the cliff where the Earl has supposedly hurled himself. Though Gloucester says, “away and let me die”, Edgar responds, “*Thy life’s a miracle. Speak yet again.*” In other words, how could you be alive after such a terrible fall? Thy life’s a miracle. Speak yet again. It is this line that calls Gloucester back from hubris and despair into the “*properly subordinated life of human grief and joy, where change and redemption are possible.*” (W. Berry)

Gloucester shows us what it means to be made well. Not just to be healed. Prior to this scene Gloucester in his anger cried, “*O you mighty gods! This world I do renounce and in your sights shake patiently might great affliction off.*” I’m in charge of my life and I will do with it what I want. I will find balance for myself and if I can’t I reserve the right to take my own life. Later, after he is not healed of his physical affliction, but made well in his spirit, he prays the opposite. “*You ever gentle gods, take my breath from me. Let not my worser spirit tempt me again to die before you please.*”

To know that your own life is a miracle, a total gift, even if you are blinded, like Gloucester, is to be made well. In Gloucester's case literally and ours metaphorically, it is to live by faith and not by sight. To know that your life isn't even really your own possession, but that you belong to God is to be made well. It is to live by grace and not by works.

To be made well is to know and believe what we say each Sunday as we present our offering to God: "*All things come of Thee O Lord and of thine own have we given thee.*" To be made well is to remember that God has given us not 50% or 75% or 99% of our lives, but 100% of all we have and all we are is a sheer gift.

Ultimately, to be made well is to be delivered from hubris into humility. It is to know that you are not in control and you never will be in control and furthermore you were not meant to have control. So why not relinquish what you don't have anyway!?

I have a dear friend who is going through an extremely dire medical situation. Upon his diagnosis he was forced to abandon his presumptions of control over his life. He adopted a mantra: "*I can't control anything. God controls everything. And He cares for me.*"

After coming through a major surgery, he looked at his fingers, stretched them, moved them. He cried out – "*what an incredible gift to move my fingers!*" He got out of the hospital bed and took his first steps, overwhelmed with the feeling that each step is a gift from God. This friend, before his dire diagnosis, was prone to control issues. Now, though very much still living with the reality of his diagnosis, is prone to tears of gratitude for the gift that is his life. Though still not outwardly fully healed, he has been made well. He speaks yet again for his life is a miracle.

When you are made well you will find that you have a whole new world of pleasure and gratitude opened up to you. It is to be able to stand at your freezer with tears of joy in your eyes and cry out, "Dear God! Perfect Ice Cubes Again!" And you can surely, like the one leper who was not just healed but made well, come and fall at Jesus' feet and thank Him.

Maybe that's why you and I are here today. Maybe we are here to be delivered from hubris into humility, where our *worser spirits* may not only be healed, but also made well. And if you're not well – and none of us is fully well – then you are definitely in the right place. Because Jesus came not for the well, but for the sick.

Amen.

