

In Holy Baptism, you were made disciples of Jesus –

Being disciples is not simply a fact,

- like being named to the National Honor Society
- and getting the tassel and pin and certificate
- that gets put in a keepsake box for posterity
- but has no lasting significance.

No, what Jesus did at your baptism – and mine

– was to call us to a life of discipleship.

Being disciples has significance for every moment of our lives,
for **from our Baptism on, we follow Jesus.**

Following Jesus is not so much a physical location as it is **a relationship with him that teaches us how to live the life God intends for us.**

- It is imitating Jesus in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- Discipleship is relationship with Jesus and with others.
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- And that means living in faith.
- Faith is trusting Jesus
- – trusting the love of God that calls us to be Jesus' disciples.
- **Faith is maintaining our relationship with God even when it seems God is not there.**
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So what does Jesus ask of those who follow him?

1. **Share the life of God's people –**
2. **Tell the story of God's salvation**
3. **Recruit others to be disciples of Jesus**

These are the fruits of faith that distinguish Christian disciples from all other people on earth.

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There is another fruit of faith that distinguishes Christian disciples from others because of its object and character.

That fruit is **gratitude** – thankfulness – thanksgiving.

(it won't be long before we eat that turkey and filling)

Now it is true that even non-Christians can be thankful,

for example when someone does something kind or gives a gift.

We learn to be polite as children, including saying those magic words “Please” and “Thank you”.

Politeness is limited to human interactions.

To thank someone for doing something nice is a simple act.

Gratitude as a fruit of faith is more than just being polite

- it is being thankful by nature,
- having the character of thankfulness.

It is being unable to be thankless or ungrateful

because of who we are.

We are disciples of Jesus Christ. We are baptized children of God.

Such gratitude by nature emerges from the relationship of following Jesus.

We are thankful because we belong to God

– because everything we are

and everything we have **is a gift from God.**

- We are thankful because **Jesus has chosen us** to follow him –
- Jesus, who loves us so much that he gave his own life for us
- and rose from the dead **so that we might follow him into eternity.**

We are thankful to God for what Jesus has done for us to live.

But we are not God's puppets.

The call to follow Jesus is something we choose to answer every morning when we wake up.

Being thankful to God for our life and salvation is a choice we make each day,

just as much as we choose to complain, or be angry at the world.

And it is often not an easy choice,

for our sinful nature, our “old Adam” as Martin Luther puts it in the catechisms,

automatically reverts to the notion that the universe exists to serve us – to fulfil our desires and to do what we want.

The biblical word for this is pride – haughtiness -- arrogance – conceit--egotism.

Infants express it as -- Waah!

Toddlers as --No! and Me!

And adults express it as some version of --Nobody's better than me!
Or "Everybody's worse than me"

(I bet we've all had our fill of such language by now)

Pride and gratitude cannot coexist because

- pride focuses attention on the self and
- gratitude focuses attention on God as the source of all good.

**Gratitude fills the heart of the Christian disciple
when pride surrenders.**

This is precisely what our two stories today demonstrate.

Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, is so proud that he asks the King of Syria to intercede with the King of Israel for his healing.

⁵ And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So Naaman went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.⁶ And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

But the king of Israel does not have the power of God to heal Naaman of his leprosy.

It is Elisha the prophet to whom God has given that power.

But Elisha knows that Naaman suffers not only from leprosy, but from pride.

Naaman cannot receive with thanksgiving what God is prepared to give him unless he surrenders his pride.

So Elisha gives him the opportunity to do that:

First, Elisha sends a messenger – he does not come in person, as Naaman thinks is his due.

This is an affront to his pride right off the bat.

Then Elisha tells him to wash in the dirty Jordan river 7 times.

The Jordan! That's like being told to wash in the Codorus. Yuk!

Naaman nearly chose to go home without being healed because he didn't want to surrender his pride.

“I expected that this man of God would come out to me personally and wave his hand over me like magic and cure me.”

If it is just a matter of washing in common water, I could have had cleaner water at home.

Have you ever felt like that? I know I have.

Why did I see the assistant instead of the doctor?

Why did my friends not wait for me? I was only 20 minutes late. . .

Can you believe it – they invited me for dinner and served it on paper plates with plastic cups! And it wasn't a picnic!

Or to quote Rodney Dangerfield "I don't get no respect!"

Notice how pride robs us of gratitude?

Many people don't have any medical care.

That I have friends at all is a blessing.

And to be invited for dinner is gracious, regardless of what it is served on.

Pride must surrender for our heart to be filled with thanksgiving.

When God says to wash in the inky stinky to be cured,
then let us rejoice to be healed rather than complain about the means.

That's what Naaman had to learn the hard way

– and his heart was transformed from pride to gratitude to God.

When Jesus healed the 10 lepers,

one surrendered his pride to return to the source of his healing and give thanks.

That he surrendered his pride was evident in several ways:

1. That he recognized Jesus as the source of his healing
2. That he returned to the source praising God loudly
3. That he fell down on his face before Jesus to give thanks.

In surrendering his pride, that leper was filled with gratitude to God for his new life.

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Now, thankfulness was not a condition for being healed

– Jesus healed all 10 even though 9 of them did not return thanks.

But the one leper was given more than just healing –

- **he was given new life**
- **and salvation.**

Our English translation doesn't quite do justice to this text.

In the original, Jesus tells the leper fallen face down at his feet to **“rise up” – the same thing Jesus does on Easter.**

And he tells him to **Go – just as he tells the church to do.**

And finally – he says, **“your faith has saved you.”**

When we surrender our pride, Jesus gives us

- a resurrection face lift,
- a mission,
- and an eternal future.

Now that's something to be thankful for!

God gives good things to people

- whether or not they believe in him,
- whether or not they thank him,
- whether or not they acknowledge him.

But it is the nature of Christian disciples that we surrender our pride
and fall down before our Lord and God

in thanksgiving for the life and salvation we receive each and
every day

because we know what Jesus has done for us.

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How do we fall down before the Lord?

In using our voices to praise God

In making sacrificial offerings to the Lord

In dedicating our lives to showing others what God has done.

For today, we are the lepers who come in our sinfulness to be healed.

And from Jesus' own hand, we are lifted up to receive new life and salvation by his forgiveness.

There is no greater reason for us to overflow in thanksgiving.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen