

For the second time in three years, I have come home from Costa Rica having left part of my heart with a little guy of no more than four or five years old. The first time, it was Mateo, a five year old heartbreaker who spent tons of time with me showing me his gold chain and playing with my necklace, only to go back to his mom and *wink* at me. Give it ten years or so and that kid is going to be a stone cold stunner with a lot of game. This year though, it was a little guy whose name I never even learned, but who to me will always be Toothbrush Kid.

Every patient who comes through the clinic leaves with a bag for their meds, but that also contains floss, toothpaste, and a toothbrush along with some information about the church in Carpio and their ministries. Part of my job was putting these bags together so we had enough, and I had spent some time pulling out the kids toothbrushes so that we had them separated and the kids could pick out their own. Well, at one point, I had put all these toothbrushes in two small buckets that were sitting behind us and of course in the midst of the chaos, one of these buckets gets knocked over. There are toothbrushes everywhere, and here comes this little guy to help me pick them up. As we finished, I realized that in the midst of all the generic Oral-B toothbrushes there was one special toothbrush—a Spider-Man toothbrush. So, I held it out to him to see if he wanted it. I kid you not, he took that

toothbrush and hugged it. Held it so tight against his chest and then toddled off back to his mom.

Fast forward to the next day. It's mid-afternoon and I am once again sitting at the check-out table. It is pouring rain and I see my little guy walk in. He is soaking wet from walking home from school in the downpour and he clocks me from across the room and just takes off, straight up runs over to me, arms out for an extremely damp hug, so I scooped him up for a nice cuddle and then, he flips his backpack around so he can get to the zipper. I'm sitting there and he's rifling through his backpack, hand all the way at the bottom, and with a flourish he pulls out...the toothbrush, now opened and clearly ready for use, and he gave me the biggest, proudest smile I have ever seen. I gave him a high five, got another hug, and off he went. I didn't see him the rest of the week, but Lord if part of me will always remain with that kid because the whole thing just made my chest ache. A toothbrush, one little Spider-Man toothbrush made this kid's day to the point that he took it to school with him and wanted to show me again.

Of all the moments I had during our week at the clinic, this is the one I haven't been able to stop thinking about and then I came home and read the gospel and was like, well here's why I suppose. Holy Spirit tends to work in

not so subtle ways sometimes, I suppose, because here we have a gospel that is plain and simple about one thing: gratitude.

We are nearing the end of Luke's pre-Passion narrative. Jesus has made the turn to Jerusalem and everything is starting to pick up the pace at this point. We are close to the end of his ministry and so his reputation far precedes him wherever he goes. In order to get to Jerusalem, Jesus needs to head south and the quickest route is one that takes him from Galilee through Samaria, so he ends up in kind of this no man's land, this in-between zone where there's a mix of ethnic and religious identities. As he comes into a village, he is approached by a group of men, men who are sick, sick with a skin disease. Now, we don't know what kind of skin disease this is, but it's safe to say that we're probably dealing with something akin to leprosy or just straight up leprosy.

With this in mind, we have to take into consideration how ancient communities dealt with this kind of situation. These aren't just ten men who are like, hey, we aren't feeling well and here's that Jesus guy maybe he can help us out. These would have been ten men who have been entirely removed from their ability to exist in community. With little medical knowledge of how to deal with skin diseases, any sign of irregularity, any chance that something could be communicable would be grounds for

sending someone into a leper colony. They wouldn't have been able to work, the only time they would have been able to see their families were in chance visits with no physical contact, they wouldn't have been able to worship with their communities, they would have been completely and totally exiled, cut off from the relationships, the activities that give life meaning, that give you strength in the midst of the difficult.

From a distance, these ten men see Jesus and they wonder...maybe this is our chance. This could be the one to change our lives. They stay as far away from Jesus as possible so as not to infect him and they shout at him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" They know he can't touch them, but they still trust he could do *something*, and Jesus gives them one simple instruction, to go show themselves to the priests. The priests would have been the ones who could declare them clean and return them to community, so they know something is about to happen. They head off and as they walk, they are healed. It is miraculous beyond comprehension. We're so used to Jesus healing by touch that for him to just tell them to walk and they are healed is incredible.

If you are these men, you are looking at your newly healed skin and being inundated with realizations. This isn't just healing, this is complete and total restoration. This is a return to their families, to their vocations, to

their worship life, to just going and walking around the marketplace and socializing with friends. This is being able to pick up your kids and shake hands with your buddies. This is standing shoulder to shoulder in prayer and being able to kiss your wife. This is *everything*. This is a feeling so overwhelming all you can do is hug that toothbrush to your chest. And what happens? Is there great shouting and rejoicing and thanksgiving? Is there exultation and exclamations of all the good God has done? No. There is one man, one lone Samaritan man who looks at his skin, recognizes the fresh start he has been given and turns around to say thank you. He throws himself at Jesus' feet and says thank you, thank you for my life, thank you for this gift, thank you for everything.

And Jesus is...flummoxed. I mean, I'm sure he's grateful for this one man, but he's also confounded because there were *ten* of them and only one came back to say thank you, to recognize the miracle they have received, and Jesus doesn't really know what to do with that it seems. So he just says what he's thinking, there were ten people healed and the only one who comes back is the *Samaritan*?! It's a question to point out the absurdity of the world. All this faith proclaimed, all of these things asked of God, but when rubber meets the road, when faith is asked to be acknowledged and fully lived out, more often than not there are crickets.

In modern day America, in our self-proclaimed Christian nation, what is the one word that tends to be used to describe Christians more than any other? Faithful? Loving? Empathetic? No. Hypocrites. Because out of the same mouths that pour Jesus, have mercy on us, come some of the deepest proclamations of hate, division, and prejudice. We don't function with a grateful heart. We certainly don't think others who are different than us should be allowed to kneel before Jesus and say thank you. And yet, over and over and over again, we see people that we would brand other, as unworthy, as less than being the ones who are displaying the behavior, living out the faith that we proclaim is ours and ours alone. And we wonder why they don't participate in Christianity without realizing that the answer is in our behavior, our commitment to the status quo, our complicity towards evil and oppression. And we might say, hey, we say thank you to Jesus all the time, but if we're so thankful for everything Jesus has given us, why aren't we acting like it? Why aren't we taking that thankful heart and pouring it out into the world?

I keep thinking about my little guy, and I wonder if any of us can remember the last time we were that thankful for something as small as a toothbrush. Do we even think about the fact that our toothbrush should be something to be thankful for? What about having clean water just be a given

to use said toothbrush? What about having access to something as small as Tums or Tylenol for those moments of heartburn or headache? Not having to walk up and down 120 broken, wet, and uneven steps just to get up to the main road of your community? We live with blinders on, with live the assumption that all of this, all of our privilege, all of our gifts are just a given, and we certainly aren't quick to thank God for any of it, because clearly this is the product of our hard work, our ability to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get something done.

What would our lives be like if we actually approached it with daily, practiced, focused gratitude? If we truly appreciated the hot water that comes out of our showers, if we held to our chests our laundry detergent or our constantly filled water bottles? Might it cause us to see the world from a different perspective. That when we see our siblings with less than we use our thankfulness to give more, to be more gracious, rather than judgmental or complacent in their suffering? Might we use our thankfulness to actually be God's hands and feet in the world? There but for the grace of God go I. Maybe instead of just being thankful that we have so much or that we aren't them, we realize we could be, and because of that, we need to give back, we need to be the moment that brings another thankfulness. Go out into the world and be someone's Spider-man toothbrush. **AMEN!!!**