

Thanksgiving Day

The Thanksgiving Journey

Luke 17:11–19

WE GIVE THANKS AND PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS WONDERFUL GIFTS.

- I. Ten lepers had much to be thankful for.
- II. Only one leper returned to give thanks.
- III. We often fail to give thanks.
- IV. We have much to be thankful for!

Sermon

For what are you thankful? Off the top of your head, you may not think of anything. We just confessed our belief that God has given us our body and soul, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses? How about clothing and shoes? food and drink? house and home? wife, children, land, or animals? For all these things it is our duty to thank and praise God. We said that for all these things, it is duty to thank and praise God, since He given them all to us even though we don't deserve them. He simply does it out of His fatherly divine goodness and mercy. That is the kind of God we have.

Have you ever done something for someone, I mean really gone beyond the call of duty to serve them, only to have them show no appreciation at all? [illustration]. You were probably disappointed. Luke records that an experience like that happened to Jesus. In our Gospel for today, we hear of ten leprosy men who were miraculously healed. But only one returned to give Jesus thanks and praise. Jesus asks him, with a trace of disappointment in His voice, "Where are the nine?" (Lk 17:17). It is our cry that God would meet our needs, whatever those needs are; physical and spiritual needs. We cry to the Lord because we believe He is our source of help and hope. Their cry for mercy is a prayer for salvation. It's a cry that encompassed all their needs—not just release from leprosy, but release from uncleanness and an end to separation from their families and friends. All ten lepers knew what they needed. They all saw Jesus as their only hope.

Jesus responded to their cry. He told them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (v 14). Jesus sent them to the place where they would be declared clean—released and returned home in every sense. So there's no doubt that all ten men believed in Jesus. With the evidence of disease still visible, they went to show themselves to the priests. On the way, all ten of them were healed of their leprosy. There's no doubt that all of them rejoiced and were happy about what happened to them. You and I can probably imagine that joyous reunion with their loved ones.

II.

But only one of them remembered who it was that had healed him. One of them, an outsider to the Jewish people—a Samaritan—saw the God of creation at work in his own life. Why does it always have to be the Samaritan that is the example of faith? The Good Samaritan stopped to help the man who was beaten and left for dead. It is the Samaritan woman at the well who listens to Jesus and then goes and tells her towns people that she met the Messiah and they were all converted. To the Caananite woman who begged Jesus for mercy for her demon-possessed daughter, Jesus said that he had not found such faith in all Israel. This one leper, a Samaritan, saw God in this man Jesus of Nazareth and returned to give thanks and praise to that God. He rejoiced, not only in the healing of his sin, but also in a healing that made him part of a community again. He was now reconciled to God, forgiven of his sins, and given a new life. This Samaritan leper's prayer for salvation, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," is fully answered. Jesus tells the man to leave his worship and continue in the journey of faith. He tells him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well" (v 19). The salvation he prayed for is now his.

III.

Today, many people give thanks for material blessings. Even people who normally have little or nothing to do with God will invoke His name and say, "Thank you." But once this National Day of

Thanksgiving is over, will they continue thanking God? Maybe they'll remember God in some time of personal, family, or national crisis. Someone survives and normal fatal disease or a bad accident. A son or daughter returns safely from Iraq or Afghanistan. But then again, maybe not. When you think someone would be able to really express gratitude, they don't. Even you and I sometimes find ourselves weak when it comes to thanking and praising God. We tend to be better askers than thankers. "God, please perform for us! Feed us! Smooth things out! Defend us against our enemies! Make us happy!" Too often we presume God's promise to feed us. We ask for our daily bread, but often forget to thank God when we get it, day in and day out. We act as if God exists solely to wait on us and meet our needs. Our wish is His command. Or is it, our command is His wish. You get the point.

IV.

And we do have many reasons to give thanks! Consider again the ten lepers from the Gospel. Jesus healed all ten of them of an incurable disease. But only the Samaritan recognized the Healer behind the healing. Only one of the ten recognized the Giver behind the gift. He believed not only that God had healed him, but also that this God was Jesus of Nazareth. The foreigner believed and returned to thank and praise. Thanksgiving flowed into worship.

Jesus may not have healed us from leprosy. But he has healed us from something infinitely greater. Jesus Christ died for us on the cross to deliver us from the diseases of sin, of death, and of the devil. You and I, who suffer from the mortal disease of sin, have been healed. In the waters of Baptism, the forgiveness won by Christ on his cross was applied to each of us. God called us by name, set us on the journey of faith, and healed us. That's more than enough reason to thank and praise God!

That thanks and praise is expressed in worship. Today we gather in worship around God's Word. We gather on Thanksgiving Day because our president issued a proclamation to do so in our respective houses of worship. We're thankful to have this time to thank God for giving us a good government and a peaceful transition from one party to the other. We give thanks for all the good gifts God has bestowed on us this year. In gratitude to God, we offer "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Tim 2:1-2).

So for what are we thankful? There's almost too much to count! All our material blessings, the privilege of having been made children of God and heirs of heaven, living in a nation with freedom, the rule of law, and freedom to worship the one true God. These are all gifts we have received and continue to enjoy. Thanks and praise to God in Jesus Christ!

As God healed all ten lepers, so He gives good gifts to the thankful and unthankful alike just because that's the kind of God He is. He makes the rain fall on the just and unjust, and the sun shines on the righteous as well as the unrighteous. He blesses the labor of the atheist and the Christian. He gives children to people of all faiths or no faith. In the explanation of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Luther listed various things that might be counted as "daily bread – all the things we need for the support of this body and life [list them]. Then he closes by saying God also gives all these things to the unfaithful but *we pray that we would receive them with thankful hearts*. You see, it's not that the Lord blesses us believers with more blessings than He does the unbelievers. The difference is that our faith causes us to recognize that God is the source of these gifts and that moves us to give Him thanks. As the thankful leper who returned to give Jesus worship and praise, we also have returned to offer thanks and praise; we praise God for the faith that enables us to thank Him for all His blessings. We join all God's people and say, "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!" (Ps 118:29). We give thanks not only today, but every day, as we journey through this life on the road of thanksgiving as recipients of God's wonderful gifts.