

THANKSGIVING SUNDAY AT GRACE

"Being Grateful to the Lord" - St. Luke 17:11-19

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, we are going to meditate in the Gospel lesson of today: St. Luke 17:11-19, which I read before. Let us pray: ***Dear Jesus, You are the Way of joy and gladness whereby we are led to heaven. You are the Truth of the universe, revealing Yourself to us with selfless sacrifice. You are the Life—in that You make life worth living here in time and hereafter in eternity. Dear Lord, may we never take You for granted! Amen***

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The gospel reading for today tells us that 10 lepers call out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus sends them off to the priests and one returns to give thanks, and that one was a Samaritan. Now what are we to make of this reading? Perhaps you think that it is simple enough; the Lord heals and little gratitude is shown. Maybe the first thing that came to mind is that the Lord is making a statement about ingratitude and that people do not thank God for their blessings. And, it is not like it would not be true.

For, surely, we are ingrates, through and through. Apart from our incredibly sinful nature, probably one of the reasons that we are so ungrateful is that God keeps pouring out His blessings on us in such abundance.

Another reason people probably do not give thanks as they should is that they think that they are the reason for their success. Whatever they have - they worked for; they earned it; they deserve it. And, that thinking even finds its way into the church; why do you think the finances of any congregation falls behind? Is it because we are all so thankful to God from whom all blessings flow, and want to give something back? Or is it because we earned that money and God can earn His own? It makes you wonder. And, that thinking goes on even further, for it would seem that those same people who are a little less than generous with their God given resources when it come to the church - think that they own the church when they need something.

Well, let me just advise everyone on that matter. Even if someone bought and paid for every brick, nail, board, and window in a church and paid the full shot for it to remain open long after that one is dead and buried, that one would still not own the church. It is the Lord's, and the Lord's alone. Just as you are the Lord's and the Lord's alone. He purchased and won you from sin, death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death, that we may be His own. He bought us, He owns us, and He owns absolutely

everything we have. There is nothing that we think we own that the Lord does not really own; for He can surely take it away from us if He wanted to.

We are not as grateful as we should be. It is as simple as that. And, at Thanksgiving preachers could make all kinds of hay telling you that you should smarten up and be more thankful. You could all leave this church with a load of guilt souring the taste of your abundant feast as it lays on the table. Even though this story of the ten lepers seems to lean in that direction; that is not really what it is about. So, what is it about? What are we to make of this reading? What is it all about? Let's then look at what the Lord Jesus Christ does and says.

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, to the cross, to complete His mission as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world by dying. Ten lepers cry out from a distance for mercy. There is no "hello" or "how do you do", no chit chat, just, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." "And it happened that while they were going away, they were cleansed." A healing takes place; ten lepers. A mass miracle. A mass cleansing.

Like blindness, so also leprosy is a picture of our natural condition. Lepers were compelled by law to separate themselves from the rest of society, from the community, from their family, and from the worship of God at the Temple, so that others would not catch this highly contagious dreaded disease. The leper also carried shame because leprosy was seen as the result of sin. The fact that one had leprosy was because one had sinned and the uncleanness was evidence of God's punishment.

So in the Bible, leprosy is a picture of sin in us; ruining our relationships with one another, ruining our relationship with God, and filling us with shame. Leprosy separates, as sin separates us from God. It is incurable except through Jesus Christ to whom these ten lepers called out for mercy. And, we do not always think of it, but mercy is the withholding of the punishment that we rightfully deserve. So the lepers are asking that Jesus help them deal with the punishment of their sins, which is evident by the leprosy.

As it happened all ten were healed, but only one returned to thank Jesus, and he was a Samaritan. The Samaritan was in a doubly bad place, not only was he a leper but also a Samaritan. Leprosy cut anyone off from the true worship of God at the Temple but being a Samaritan cut one off from the true worship of God at the Temple as well. The Samaritan had their own temple, not the one in Jerusalem. Now this man could go to Jerusalem and show himself to the priests, but he could never offer the necessary sacrifices for ritual cleansing because he is a foreigner.

The Samaritan has got everything going against him; he cannot worship correctly and he has this physical ailment that keeps him cast out of God's people. This man and other Samaritans are cut off, they are not ceremonially clean and they are not the people of God; they are foreigners. So, what is Jesus message to them? What is Jesus saying to these Samaritans, these foreigners, these lepers, these outcasts, these who are cut off from God?

What He is saying is what we have recorded as the last words of our reading today, "Arise and go, your faith has saved you." There it is. That is what this reading is all about. It is all about Jesus. It is all about the word of Jesus being declared to those who are cut off from the promises of God. It is good news for the Samaritan, for the foreigner, for the leper, for the outcast, for the sinner.

Friends, that means it is good news for you and me too, for truly we are sinners. We are ingrates through and through. We are rebels against God cutting ourselves off from God in every thought, word, and deed. It is good news for us who are outcasts having no hope except in Jesus who was on His way to a horrible death on the cross of Jerusalem to save us.

So that He could receive the outcasts, and forgive the sinners, those who are separated from God, separated in one or two or a hundred different ways. Separated by all of the sins that you are willing to speak about and all of those that you are too ashamed to ever mention. Jesus knows all of that. He knows where you live, and how you live, and what you are all about. You are not kidding Him one little bit. And what does Jesus say about all of this? Exactly what He said to the Samaritan, "Arise and go, your faith has saved you."

Surely now we understand that this reading is not about what was first thought. But, that does not diminish the fact that gratitude and ingratitude are not serious problems amongst us.

The central theme in this story is Jesus, true God to be worshiped and thanked by the Samaritan for the healing and salvation that he now has because of Jesus. The era of salvation in Jesus is at hand. When Jesus is here there is cleansing, there is healing, there is forgiveness, there is salvation from the gracious hand of the Messiah our Lord and Saviour. The place to give thanks for cleansing, and healing, and forgiveness is where Jesus is.

This story was recorded in the Bible for our benefit. And if it is telling us that wonderful things are happening in the presence of Jesus, and praise and thanksgiving is happening in the presence of Jesus, then point me to the place where Jesus is. Show me the way to where this Jesus is. And, that is not a problem in this church where we gather around word and sacrament. It might be a problem other places but it sure is not something we need to wonder about. For, Christ our Saviour, the Messiah who brings forgiveness and salvation comes to us as His word is spoken and

where His sacraments are administered. Right here, this is the place to be because this is the place where Jesus said He would be. And He is here for you; for you were not God's people but are now God's people by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He is here for you; for you are a sinner who has received forgiveness.

He is here for you; for you have gone from death to new life in Christ, a new life that will not end, a new life full of eternal promise through Jesus Christ in holy Baptism. Even as we have seen at Grace for ten years now. Adults and babies who were not of the people of God but are now the people of God; connected to new life, forgiveness, and eternal salvation through Adult Confirmation and Baptism.

It is also right here in the word and sacrament that the church bows down before the presence of the crucified and risen Christ, who gives His body and blood in a meal where His divine cleansing is for all who, like the Samaritan, are saved by grace through faith. As we have heard before and hear again and again, week after week, in this church, the kingdom of God is among you (17:21), for the kingdom is wherever the King is, and the King is in His Church. And as the King is in His Church, the people of God from every race and nation gather to confess His holy name and receive His blessings, "rise and go; the faith God gave you in the Saviour Jesus has made you well." Amen.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord,
and Savior. Amen.