

## **THE THANKSGIVING JOURNEY**

### **Thanksgiving Day 2014**

#### **Text: Luke 17:11-19**

For what are you thankful? Off the top of your head, you may not think of anything. Then again, you might think of many things. Did you think of your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses? How about clothing and shoes? food and drink? house and home? wife, children, land, or animals? These are all Gifts that Dr. Martin Luther reminds us (in his Small Catechism) that God graciously gives. And he also reminds us that "For all these things it is our duty to thank and praise...God."

Have you ever done a lot for someone who showed no appreciation? 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 hint of disappointment in his voice, "Where are the other nine?" How often are we like the other nine, forgetting to say thanks for the wonderful gifts we've received from God? Tonight it's only fitting to remember we should give thanks and praise for God's wonderful gifts.

The nine who didn't return to thank Jesus did have faith in him. They all cried out, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" Other translations of Luke have the lepers saying, "Lord, have mercy on us!" This 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. You see, leprosy rendered them unclean and required that they be separated from the community, left alone to die an agonizing death as the disease progressed. If anyone approached, they were to call out the warning: "Unclean! Unclean!" All ten lepers knew what they needed. They all saw Jesus as their only hope.

Jesus responded to their cry. He told them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Jesus sent them to the place where they would be declared clean-released and returned home in every sense. Had this ever happened before? Had any priest ever been able to declare a leper cured and clean again? After all, the disease had no known cure!

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. That's a leap of faith, isn't it? And lo and behold, 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.

But only one of them remembered who it was that had healed them. Only one of them, an outsider to the Jewish people-a Samaritan-saw the God of creation at work in his own life. This one leper 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 pity on us!" is fully answered. Jesus tells the man to leave his worship and continue in the journey of faith. He tells him, "Go; your faith has made you well." The salvation he prayed for is now his.

Today, many people are giving 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. But then again, maybe not. 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.

And we do have lots of reasons to give thanks! Consider again the ten lepers. 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 flows out in worship. This morning we gather in worship around God's Word. We gather because President Abraham Lincoln declared it to be a federal holiday in 1863. But we Christians don't need to presidential mandate to give thanks to God when we are day in and day out recipients of all his many blessings, physical, material, and spiritual. We're thankful to have this time to thank God for giving us a good government. We give thanks for all the good gifts God has bestowed on us this year. In gratitude to God, St. Paul reminds us that "requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

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 freedoms, 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 the ten lepers, so does He give good gifts to the thankful and unthankful alike. As the thankful who have returned to offer thanks and praise, we praise God for the faith that enables us to thank him for all his blessings. "O give thanks unto the Lord! For his mercy endures forever." 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. In the name of Jesus, Amen.