

Sermon for November 26, 2015 – Thanksgiving

Luke 17:11-19 (NIV84)

Theme: Celebrate a Samaritan's Thanksgiving

- 1) See how Christ healed you from the leprosy of sin
- 2) Come back to offer him true thanksgiving.

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

I am happy to see each of you here today. I realize how tempting it was to sleep in, use this time to prepare Thanksgiving dinner, or do other things on this holiday morning. Instead, you came here to thank the Lord for all the good things he has done for you - just like the Samaritan in our Gospel lesson.

The main purpose of today's sermon text is to reveal Jesus' divine power to heal even the worst physical diseases. If he can do this, than he must be the Christ who deserves our total worship and praise.

Having said that, I also believe that this text can serve as an excellent illustration of both how we are saved and our proper response to our salvation. And it's these things we will consider this morning under the theme: **Celebrate a Samaritan's Thanksgiving** 1) See how Christ healed you from the leprosy of sin 2) Come back to offer him true thanksgiving.

Part One: See how Christ healed you from the leprosy of sin

Our sermon text begins: *Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him.*

Leprosy is a highly infectious skin disease that corrupts the flesh. God's Old Testament law commanded lepers to be separated from the rest of the community. They were not allowed in the temple unless they were healed. They lived in camps outside of villages and cities, and had to yell, "Unclean! Unclean!" if anyone would come near so that a healthy person could avoid contact with them.

Spiritually speaking, we are all like lepers before God. The highly infectious disease of sin has thoroughly corrupted our nature. We are unclean and have been barred from heaven until our sin is taken away. We are helpless, sick and - if it weren't for Jesus - dying without hope.

Thankfully we aren't without Jesus, and neither were the ten lepers in our text. Somehow they heard about him - his miracles and compassion - and believed that he could heal them from their horrible disease. This is why, when they heard that Jesus was passing by the area, they did not yell, "Unclean! Unclean!" Instead, *they stood at a distance* (so as not to make him unclean) *and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*

And Jesus pitied them. His divine, all-knowing nature saw them before they even knew he was there. He planned to be present at that moment so that they might call out to him for the mercy that he had already decided to show them from before the creation of the world.

In a similar yet greater way, Jesus saw us from eternity. He planned for us to hear about him and his love through the preaching of His Word. He did this so that, both recognizing our sins and trusting in His mercy, we would cry out to him while he is near.

And that is exactly what we have been led to do. Just as the ten lepers recognized Jesus as their master, from whom they deserve nothing - so we too recognize that we are nothing but beggars before God, who are not entitled to receive anything from him. And yet, like the lepers, we trust that Jesus has the power and authority to help us. More than that, we trust that if we simply ask him for mercy, he will show it. Why? Because of who he is: our loving Savior who came to deliver us from sin, death and the power of the devil. And so we continually cry out "kyrie eleison" - LORD, have mercy.

We read: *When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.*

Knowing the desire of their heart, Jesus sent them to the priest. Why? Not to be healed, but that they might be declared clean in accordance with the law of Moses. No, Jesus had not yet healed them, but he would. He wanted them to act on faith, and that is exactly what they did. So they walked - still sick and covered with sores - trusting that Jesus would keep his Word.

And Jesus kept his word. They were all cleansed of their leprosy.

This healing most excellently illustrates our spiritual cleansing from sin. How often don't we call out to Jesus in repentance - feeling the great burden of our sin? God's Word tells us that we are forgiven, but we certainly don't feel it. Like the lepers leaving Jesus for the temple - still seeing their leprosy - we still see our sins and guilt. Are we really forgiven? And this is where faith comes in: no matter how we feel, we take Jesus at his Word. And so we confidently approach God in prayer - trusting in his promise to forgive. We walk by faith, not by feelings! And, as we trust in Jesus' promise of forgiveness, a change comes over us. We are forgiven, and that forgiveness brings us great joy. Jesus has healed us from our leprosy of sin, let us now see how we can offer him true thanksgiving.

Part Two: Come back to offer him true thanksgiving.

¹⁵ *One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"*

Where were the other nine? I imagine that as soon as they saw they were healed they smiled, offered a quick prayer to God, and ran double time to the priest so that they could be publicly declared clean. I imagine that some of them went back to their family and friends, with whom they were not allowed to have contact for such a long time. I imagine the others thought about how they would do all sorts of incredible things now that they were healed: how they would live life to the fullest - enjoying every moment of their health. They were given a new lease on life and did not want to squander it.

Sadly, however, that is exactly what they did: squander their new lease on life. Jesus did not heal them that they could live life to the fullest, but that they could live their life for him. He wanted them to enter into a new relationship with him.

Every proper gift is meant to draw attention to the compassion of its giver - to create or strengthen a bond of love between to giver and receiver. This fact was missed by the nine Jewish lepers. All they cared about was the gift - not giving a second thought to him who gave it. And in doing so, they lost the greatest gift of all - salvation.

Unfortunately, these nine lepers do a good job illustrating how many Christians receive God's gift of forgiveness after confession. Yes, they are happy that they are forgiven - and maybe even offer a quick prayer to God for it. But, instead of seeing how this forgiveness is meant to draw them closer to the LORD, they merely think about how it can serve their earthly advantage. Just like the nine Jewish lepers, they don't realize they have done anything wrong. However, since their hearts are not on Jesus - they end up squandering their spiritual healing.

You see, the absolution we receive after confession is not merely meant to relieve our feelings of guilt so that we can get our lives back on the path we had planned out for ourselves. The gift of forgiveness is meant to draw us into a closer relationship with Jesus. And if we aren't drawn into a closer relationship with him, we soon forget him - losing our source of salvation in the process.

This is why Jesus praises the faith of the Samaritan leper, saying: *"Rise and go; your faith has [saved] you.*

Now, if you were following along with me in the bulletin, you might notice that I changed "made you well" to "save." I did this on purpose because this is what Jesus actually said - "made well" is merely the NIV's interpretation of the Greek word "saved."

But I like there word “saved”. Why? Because I am convinced that when Jesus talks about how the leper's faith saved him, he is referring to far more than the physical healing granted to all the lepers. He is talking about a special faith the Holy Spirit awakened in the Samaritan's heart, which caused him to trust in Jesus as his true God and Savior. The Samaritan leper's faith “saved” him in the sense that it grabbed hold of Jesus. You can see this in the thanksgiving the leper offered: how he was unashamed to publicly praise God with a loud voice - telling everyone what great things Jesus had done for him. This leper put his life on hold to come back to Jesus and thank him - not wanting to leave Christ’s side until Jesus was ready to let him go.

Brothers and sisters in Christ; let us learn to celebrate this Samaritan's kind of thanksgiving. How? By not receiving God’s gifts in a self-serving way. Rather let us receive them for their intended purpose: as a means to get us to think about his great love for us. God gives his gifts so that we might constantly thank him - that is, constantly think about him and his gracious work of providing all the blessings and forgiveness we need for our physical and spiritual life.

Jesus wants us to continually receive all his gifts like the Samaritan leper - not just offering a quick prayer and moving on, but running back to him every time there is worship; and when there isn’t, seeking him through private Bible reading at home. He wants us to tell our family, friends and neighbors about all the great things he has done so that they too might repent, believe and have eternal life.

This is how our God wants us to thank him: not merely by coming to church today, but by remaining with him every day - always rejoicing in who he is and what he has done for us. This, brothers and sisters in Christ, is how we celebrate a Samaritan’s thanksgiving. May the LORD continually move us to do so. Amen