

Luke 17:11-19

Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 2017

Theme: We express our thanks to God

I. We call on him for mercy

II. We worship him who has had mercy

INJ What would make today a great day? It starts with worship, right? Then there are so many possibilities! The meal will be delicious. Perhaps a football game will be exciting. Having family around is wonderful. You can order your Black Friday deals online in the evening as you munch leftovers. You could have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

Or, today could be a disaster. The turkey got dry. The refs made a bad call. Your family is annoying – again. What about the debt you incur on the credit card? Maybe your health isn't so strong. This evening, you spend time arguing and yelling or being sullen and sad. Did you drink too much? What a mess! Can you even call it Thanksgiving?

I guess we can be thankful and grumpy at the same time. We have all said, "I am thankful, but ..." and then ranted in a most unthankful manner. But thankfulness is meant to be shown. It isn't an inside emotion, but an expression that flows from faith. I know our natural hearts are self-absorbed. When we have many blessings we don't notice – because we are busy doing things we want to do. When our life is difficult, we are busy, too, making the best of it. Instead of thankfulness, we express disappointment and anger. Frustration is so natural and quick to be seen! Thankfulness – that takes the miracle of God to produce in us.

Whether we count abundant opportunities or abundant challenges, God gives us the gift of thankfulness as we see his undeserved love for us. The Gospel appointed to be read on Thanksgiving Day exposes our self-centeredness and shows us Jesus who alone motivates our thankfulness.

It is a familiar account. Ten lepers were healed. Jesus showed his Almighty power as God. I am pretty sure all ten of those men were thankful in one way or another. Yet only one returned to express thanks to Jesus who had healed him. We gather today for a reminder not just to be thankful, but to show it – to express our thanks to God. We call on him for mercy and we worship him who has had mercy.

Jesus was traveling up to Jerusalem and as he approached a village, he was met by the cry of these ten lepers – people who were infected with skin diseases. They had to endure hardship that we can barely imagine. The nature of their skin disease was that it could be contagious. To stop the spread of leprosy they were sent away. They had to live

separate from their family and friends. If anyone approached them they had to call out to warn them away because they were infected.

Not only were they unable to socialize and shop, they could not gather for worship. They were unclean, separated from those who would encourage them in the faith. How alone these outcasts must have felt! At least these ten had found each other for mutual encouragement. Here they were, all of them infected. Cut off. Dying. In their desperate need they called out: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

The disease of leprosy includes a variety of skin diseases. The worst is the kind where your skin dies from the end of your extremities and works its way back to the middle. Other skin diseases were rashes and smaller infections that might go away after a time. In every case, leprosy was visible and obvious. Diseased skin is plainly evident.

If only we would recognize as easily how disgusting and deadly is our infection by sin! Sin doesn't present itself with a rash on the outside, but it dwells in our heart. Sin separates us from God's presence. It cuts us off from his grace. God describes our heart as completely corrupt. We are sinful through and through. You can see it on the outside sometimes. Our words and actions are unclean. Hatred, lust, anger, greed ooze out of us and show themselves in obvious ways. We cannot fix our condition and it will not go away. The separation of death is the just wages for our sin.

Aren't we in the hopeless predicament those lepers were in? "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" This is why he came, isn't it? Jesus the Christ has come to have mercy. He washes away our guilt. His perfect obedience supplied the holiness we need before God. His death on the cross paid the price for our rebellion. His resurrection from the dead assures us that the rescue we need has been accomplished.

"Have mercy on us!" Trusting Jesus' almighty power and his undeserved love, we express our thanks to him by calling to him for mercy. He hears us! He has had mercy! He proclaims our forgiveness. We live in his peace. Filled with faith, we express our thanks to God.

We have many needs in addition to the need for forgiveness. Jesus also supplies them in his mercy. We have food and shelter, family and friends, peace and order. Knowing and trusting our Savior, how can we not call to him for help in our daily experience, too? He invites us to "cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us." To "call on his name in the day of trouble." To "pray without ceasing."

How often are we silent? Do we expect our own smarts and strength to see us through? Sure, we know about Jesus and we love him

and all, but do we really need him for this? Does he care about it? Will he help? It is not only weak thankfulness if we do not cry to him. It is sin! Jesus has promised. He is able. He is willing. Call to Jesus for his mercy!

The answer of God comes to you in the inspired word of Scripture. There he shows you what he has done for you. A manger. A cross. An empty tomb. In the Sacrament, the Lord repeats his promise of peace and assures you of his abiding presence. He is reliable. He is loving. He is your Savior. Express your thanks to God as you call on him in every need. By his word and sacraments, the Lord fills you with thanks.

The key to expressing our thankfulness is God's words. He invites us to come to him. He promises to forgive us. He proclaims who he is and what he has done. He even gives us thankful hearts. We express our thanks to him by trusting those words and using them faithfully. In those words God sends his Spirit to work miracles. He created and sustains faith in us. He forgives our sin. The Lord moves us to not just think about it, but to express our thanks as we worship him who has had mercy on us.

Jesus told ten lepers to go back to the priests for the official certification that their leprous quarantine was over. Ten lepers believed Jesus word and headed for town. Along the way their disease left them. All ten of them! Nine former lepers apparently hurried to the priests and back to their homes. One went back to express his thanks to Jesus. He returned to the presence of the Mighty God who had healed him. He fell to his knees and with a loud voice praised God for his mercy. This man, who happened to be a Samaritan, couldn't stop expressing his thanks.

It wasn't the easy choice for the one. He probably had a family who missed him. He could have done what all the others did and went home. Instead he came back to find Jesus. Instead of just being thankful, he was determined to express his thanks and raise his voice in worship of the God who had mercy on him.

As a selfish person who is sinful through and through, I am shamed by this Samaritan. Would I have gone out of my way to return and thank God? Do I remember the abundance of mercies that the Lord has shown me? When I do, is a lame passing thought all the thankfulness I can be bothered to give? How often I fail to express my thankfulness to God!

God does not withdraw his gifts. Instead he calls me back. "Where are the other nine?" Jesus asks, longing for me to return. Jesus gives full forgiveness, even for my faulty thankfulness. His blood paid the price and washes me clean of all my idolatry. I have been reconciled to God and I have peace with him. I am so glad Jesus asked where I was!

"Where are the other nine?" Where are you? Return to worship the Savior who has had mercy on you. Raise your voice to the God who has made you his own in baptism. Who keeps you in faith by his Word. Who fills your life with blessings no one can count! Express your thanks to God, worshipping the one who has had mercy on you.

"Where are the other nine?" is a question that we sometimes ask with a bit of smug self-confidence. I am here at worship but look who isn't! At least I expressed my thankfulness! If only they were more like me! See how insidious is our sinful self? It seeks to make even the fruit of faith that is thanksgiving into self-centered sin. Indeed, there are many more who could be expressing their thanks right here, but their absence does not diminish our thanksgiving. God's grace is not less amazing. Our worship and our praise honor the Savior. We will express our thanksgiving with all our heart, declaring the praises of him who has had mercy on us!

Our thanksgiving is as hearty and joyful as that healed leper's, not because of what we do, but because of what our God has done for us. It is not about counting possessions or remembering relationships. We have a living Savior Jesus Christ! We have peace with God. Our home in heaven is secured! Every day we find strength in the gospel as it comes to us in word and sacrament. Our God is faithful. He is merciful. He has made us thankful, expressing thanks in worship of him who has had mercy on us.

It has to be said that our worship does not just take place in this building. Yes, this is the place we receive the sacraments and where we hear God's word proclaimed to us, but our worship also goes home with us. We read God's Word and sing his praises with our children and our spouse. Worship includes how we do everything to the glory of our God out of hearts of faith. Paul said, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." We raise our voice today with the one healed leper who returned, praising God for his mercy. We express our thanks to God every day, worshipping him in everything we do.

Thanksgiving Day is full of fun and tasty and memorable things. Give thanks to God for his gifts. Not just in your heart, but with your mouth and your hands and your whole self. Give thanks, not just today, but every day. Not just for the physical abundance, but more so for the spiritual peace that is yours in Christ. Isn't the most important and best part of our thanksgiving that Jesus fills us with his gospel words? In every need, we call on him for mercy. We eagerly worship our Savior. Every day, we get to express our thanks to him. SDG Amen.