

**Give Thanks to the Lord! – Luke 17:11-19**

What does Thanksgiving mean to you? When you think back over the years and this special time of year, what comes to mind? Thanksgiving has always been a big deal in my family since it's my mom's favorite holiday. With my dad in the Air Force, we always lived far away from grandparents. When we lived around 16 hours from them, we would almost always have Thanksgiving with them. We would jump in the van after school on Wednesday, drive until my dad was too sleepy to keep going, spend the night at a hotel, and be back on the road as the sun slowly crept over the horizon. Finally we would get to my grandparent's house and enjoy the feast that is Thanksgiving.

I did the same when I was in college. Because I didn't have a car yet, my grandma would drive a few hours to pick me up. Then I would drive her car for the next 16ish hours to get to my brother's place in Knoxville, TN. While you may think that those trips would be awkward or boring, I enjoyed them. I was able to spend some alone time with my grandma and hear all of her stories.

Because isn't that what Thanksgiving is usually all about? Family and friends taking time off to get together, despite how crazy we drive each other, with some wonderful food and the football game in the background. I know we all celebrate Thanksgiving differently. But no matter how we celebrate Thanksgiving is just that – a time to give thanks for everything we have. Thanks for the people in our lives; thanks for the banquet of food before us. But above all, as we look at all those blessings, it is a time to give thanks to the Lord.

While Thanksgiving wasn't made an official American holiday until 1863 with President Lincoln, people have always found occasions to give thanks. In the portion of God's Word we are looking at this evening, we see one such time. As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, the Gospel of Luke tells us that **“Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’”** As Jesus approaches this contentious border town, 10 men with leprosy see Jesus coming and are desperate for his healing. Because of their leprosy, they were actual outcasts. They couldn't live in town with everyone else because of their disease. They couldn't go to church because they were ceremonially unclean. They couldn't go to a doctor to get a pill to cure their leprosy. The only chance they had

for a regular life again was for Jesus' healing touch. And so, with hearts trusting in Jesus' power to heal them, they appealed to his mercy.

And Jesus, having compassion on them, without even touching them, told them **“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”** In order to be publicly declared clean and able to reenter society, they had to go to Jerusalem, show themselves to the priests, and offer the prescribed sacrifices. Altogether this would take at least 2 weeks. Yet these 10 lepers trusted in Jesus' power to heal them. So they set out for Jerusalem and, as Luke tells us, **“as they went, they were cleansed.”**

How would you feel if you were one of those cleansed lepers? As you look at your skin, you no longer see the marks of leprosy. The spots on your skin as white as the snow have disappeared and everything is how it was. Would you be just a little bit giddy? Would you be smiling for the first time in who knows how long? I know I would. The full realization of my cleansing would mean – I can finally sleep in my own bed! I can hold my wife and children again! No longer will I have to listen to the preacher and harmonious music of church through the doors and windows. I can go in and worship my Lord with all my brothers and sisters again!

I wonder, when you read about Jesus' miracles and healings, do they lift your spirits? Or do they bring you down? Whenever we hear about good things happening to other people, it seems natural to get a little envious or doubtful if those things could ever happen to us. But you know what? Our Lord has already blessed us in so many ways. Who is it that sends the rains and sun to make sure we have more than enough food? Who put our planet in the perfect place so that we don't crash into the Sun or drift away? It is our Lord and him alone. Not only does he make sure everything out there works, he gives us everything that Thanksgiving is all about. He gives us the ability to work so we can buy and prepare food. He gives us the blessings of our friends and family members. He gives us our minds to come up with a sport like football and our bodies to play it. As you gather round the dinner table tomorrow with eyes far bigger than your plate, remember to give thanks to your Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord for his blessings of food, family, and football. Give thanks to the Lord for everything you can see. But also give thanks to the Lord for his blessings which you cannot see – especially the blessing of our Savior Jesus Christ. After Jesus healed the 10 lepers, he continued on his way to Jerusalem. The compassion that he showed to those 10 lepers in that small border town he would

show to the whole world on the cross. Our Savior would be sentenced to die on that cross. He could carry the rough wooden cross on his bloody back. He would have a crown of thorns shoved into his head and nails driven through his hands and feet. And he endured all this because the righteous Lord was punishing him for our sins.

Everything Jesus suffered was for our sake so that we would not have to face God's wrath. Jesus was sentenced to die on the cross so that we may live. Jesus carried that rough wooden cross on his bloody back so that we may walk without any burdens weighing us down. Jesus had that crown of thorns and those nails driven into him so that his holy blood may wash away our countless sins. Jesus received the full punishment from God so that instead God may shower us with his favor and love.

But as if that were not enough, our Lord blesses us by telling us about our Savior. He gives us his trustworthy Word and the Holy Spirit who gives us faith. He brings rebellious souls into his heavenly family through Baptism and reassures guilty consciences through Holy Communion. My brothers and sisters, when you sit down tomorrow to enjoy your Thanksgiving Dinner, give thanks to the Lord for his blessings. Not just those we see, but also the unseen blessings of your faith and your Savior.

And whenever you give thanks to the Lord, do it as the one leper who came back to Jesus. As Luke tells us, **“when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan.”** Notice how quickly and heartfelt his thanksgiving was! Once he saw that he was healed, he didn't wait 2 weeks to get back from Jerusalem. He came back right away praising God with a loud voice. He threw himself down at Jesus' feet, a sign of utmost humility and respect to the Savior of all the world. But here's the kicker – he was a Samaritan, a foreigner. The one who was the least likely to give thanks to Jesus did so. The one who most likely didn't know all of what God said in the Old Testament had faith in Jesus. Not just a faith that Jesus could heal his leprosy – that's what the other 9 lepers had. No, the Samaritan's faith trusted that Jesus was his Savior. As the original Greek says, his faith has saved him from his sins.

We have the same faith as the Samaritan. So give thanks to the Lord as he did. Do it with all your heart. The Samaritan came back, praising God with a loud voice and threw himself at Jesus' feet. Our Lord has blessed us so much it's

impossible to count all his blessings. The physical blessings we see are just a taste of the blessings still come. He gave us Jesus to be our Savior and the Holy Spirit so we may believe all his promises. Give thanks to the Lord and do so quickly. The Samaritan didn't wait 2 weeks to find Jesus and then give him thanks. He did so right away. So we too ought to be quick when we give thanks. It can be as simple as a prayer with the words we happen to find in the moment. Because if you're like me and wait till until everything is in place to finally give thanks, by then we've forgotten or it's not as heartfelt as it originally was.

But above all, give thanks to the Lord with your actions. The Samaritan showed how thankful he was by immediately going back to Jesus to give thanks. So we too give thanks to the Lord with our lives. Last Saturday as Pastor Kassulke lead the men in a Bible study on 1 John where the Apostle John tells us in chapter 3 **“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”** We aren't to limit our thanksgiving to words. We are to show with our lives. And what better way to show our thankful love than with the same blessings God has given us? If the Lord has blessed you with an abundance of time because you're retired or on break from school, thankfully use a portion of that time to volunteer for the church or tell your family members about their loving Savior. If the Lord has blessed you with an abundance of things in your life that you no longer need, thankfully donate them to those who could use them instead as you show the compassion that Jesus showed to the 10 lepers. If the Lord has blessed you with an abundance of wealth so you can afford more than the bare necessities of life, thankfully offer a portion of that back to him in the plate so that more people may hear about their Savior. And as you do all of these, let your thanks always flow from a thankful heart for the countless blessings our God lavishes on us.

At the beginning of tonight's message, we reviewed what Thanksgiving normally means. Friends and family gathering around food and football. But Thanksgiving is more than that. It is a chance to consider again all the blessings God gives us. He gives us far more than what we need or deserve. He gives us our most important blessing – our Savior Jesus Christ. He gives us the Holy Spirit who strengthens our faith through his Word. And so it is with a faith of the Samaritan leper that we give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Amen.