

Luke 17:11–19
14th Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
September 10, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

There's something very off putting about someone who is not thankful for what they have. From a worldly standpoint alone, you can see how annoying it is when someone doesn't realize what they've been given. We see how those who aren't grateful for what they've been given end up losing what they do have. Thankless children stop receiving gifts. Ungrateful spouses end up destroying a marriage. If your charity is taken for granted, you end up losing all cheerfulness in giving and end up despising those you serve, and eventually the service comes to a halt. That's the downfall of many not-for-profit organizations.

Of course, thanksgiving isn't payment for what's been given. Sometimes children think saying thank you is the one thing they *have* to do to keep getting gifts. And sometimes that's just a part of learning good manners. As you grow up, though, you realize thanksgiving isn't a payment you make or receive for services rendered. Thanksgiving is simply expressing, or confessing openly, appreciation for another's efforts. Thanksgiving is the proper response to receiving a gift. To not give thanks, then, shows a disregard for what has been given, and even more problematic, a disregard for the giver.

So if thanksgiving is so important from a worldly perspective, and a lack of thanksgiving causes so much pain and division, how much more so is it with God? God is the giver of all good things: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). Ultimately,

everything we've been given for our life and salvation can be traced back to God. But how often do we find ourselves not thanking the LORD? How often do we find ourselves complaining and grumbling instead? Or taking what's been given us as something we have a right to? Or not thinking much about it at all? It's easy to brush off the sin of thanklessness in ourselves and others and consider it just a bad habit or a minor vice. In reality, thanklessness is a sign of unbelief or of withering faith. Thanklessness ends up stifling the faith God has given us.

In this morning's Gospel Lesson, which many churches also use for Thanksgiving Day, we see the difference between thanksgiving and thanklessness in the example of the ten lepers. All ten lepers suffered from the debilitating skin disease of leprosy, which in so many ways reminds us of the debilitating sin suffered by all the descendants of Adam, save one. Leprosy rendered people unclean and separated them from God and man. When a Jew contracted leprosy, he was no longer allowed to worship in the Temple or live in community with the healthy. He was cast outside the city for an unfortunate fate.

That's what sin does to us as well, but in a spiritual sense. Sin, like leprosy, renders us unclean in the sight of God and separates us from both God and man. Sin means we are separated from truly worshiping the LORD and from living the way we ought to live with others. Sin distorts how we think about ourselves. Either we think more highly of ourselves than we ought, or we have no self-worth at all—or some combination of the two. Sin distorts how we think of others, by either paying too much attention to what others think about us, or by disregarding other people and their needs. Sin distorts our relationship with God and others in many different ways that change from day to day or even hour to hour. Sin is a spiritual leprosy that has deep roots within us. And we often can't stop our sinful thoughts from sprouting forth into sinful words and deeds. The disease on the inside shows itself outwardly. Our sin makes us

unclean, both inside and out, and it separates us from God and others. When you truly measure your life according to the Ten Commandments, you'll see how sinful you actually are. And if you don't recognize your sinful tendencies, well, that just shows how deep the darkness really is.

Christians cry out like the ten lepers in today's Gospel Lesson: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us. That's what we sing every Sunday in the Kyrie. We confess the leprosy of our sin and say: "Lord, I'm completely soiled by sin, from head to toe. I'm separated from you and from others and I want to do better. I want to be better." If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Jesus cleanses you from head to toe by taking your sins upon Himself. Your sins—all of them, the ones you commit everyday, against God and other people—are laid upon Jesus and nailed to the cross. They are forgiven for His sake. In the death of Jesus, all your sins were paid for. The blood of Jesus cleanses you from the leprosy of sin. That's why in the Book of Leviticus, a healed leper would go to the priest and the priest would slaughter a sacrificial lamb and put the blood of the sacrifice on the leper's right earlobe, on his right thumb, and on his right big toe. The blood of the lamb cleanses your entire body, from head to foot. The blood of the Lamb of God cleanses you from the leprosy of all sin.

Jesus tells the lepers to go show themselves to the priests. He tells those who are still unclean to regard themselves as already clean, to go prove their cleansing to the priests and then offer the sacrifices required by the Law. The lepers go, and on the way they are miraculously healed according to the Lord's will. Those who regard themselves as clean in God's sight are clean already. As Jesus says in John 15: "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." In Jesus and in His word of absolution, you are considered clean in the sight of God, even though your old sinful nature is still with you. The old Adam hangs onto you for dear

life, yet the new man arises daily in repentance and the forgiveness of sins, to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Though sin remains with you until the day you die, God no longer sees it or regards it for the sake of Christ. In Him, in Jesus through Holy Baptism, you are considered clean of your sins already now. Thanks be to God!

And so one of the ten lepers returns to Jesus in thanksgiving. Jesus says: “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner?” Only one of the ten lepers returned to Jesus, praising God with a loud voice and falling at God’s feet to give Him thanks: the Samaritan. The others were Jews, on their way to the Temple to show themselves to the priest and return to their normal lives. But the Samaritan wasn’t welcome at the Temple. He was despised and rejected by the Jewish people, like we heard last week in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He couldn’t go to the Temple in Jerusalem, but he could have returned to his home and to his people in Samaria. Instead, the Samaritan comes to Jesus, the true Temple, the source of healing and new life. How could he just return to his old way of living? How could the nine just go back to life as usual?

In Jesus Christ, all your sins and the sins of the whole world are forgiven. Yet how many new Christians, or long-time Christians, or any of those who were raised up in our most holy faith, end up departing from Jesus and going their own way? They were healed, and instead of bowing down at the feet of Jesus they go back to life as usual. They were healed of their disease simply to go home, live a few more years, and die again. The nine end up returning to the spiritual leprosy from which they had been healed. This is a spirit of thanklessness that reigns wherever God has done marvelous things. Where nothing but thanksgiving is called for, a recognition and praise for what God has done, an attitude of ungratefulness is close at hand. That’s the old Adam, the sinful nature still clinging to your flesh, trying to drag you down and

make you forget the glorious things God does for you everyday. Faith responds to God's works with thanksgiving. Unbelief responds to God's works with grumbling and anger, or worse, with indifference. Thankfulness keeps the works of God ever in mind, but thanklessness leads to a gradual loss of God's gifts, a gradual loss of faith. Thanksgiving is a fruit of faith. Thanklessness is how faith is stifled and eventually smothered to death.

Jesus then says to the Samaritan: "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." Literally: "your faith has saved you." The others were healed, they were given the same blessing as the Samaritan. But only the Samaritan returns to Jesus in faith. Only the Samaritan is cleansed of his spiritual leprosy and responds in thanksgiving. The unbelief of the nine overflows with thanklessness, with indifference or contempt. But the faith of the Samaritan overflows with thanksgiving, keeping the works of God for him ever before his eyes. That's what a spirit of thanksgiving does for you, too. It keeps the works God does for you ever before your eyes.

So how do you foster such a spirit of thanksgiving? How do you keep your sinful nature from stifling your thanks and praise to God for everything He has done for you in Christ Jesus? The first thing is to recognize that everything you have is a gift from God. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray: "Give us this day our daily bread," knowing full well that God gives daily bread even to all evil people. But we pray that God would lead us to realize this, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Pray that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to recognize all the things you have to be thankful for: your eternal salvation, your understanding of God's Word, your church and family, your friends and neighbors, your body and soul, your job that puts food on the table, your health, peace, a functioning government, self-control. There are so many things God gives that you can be thankful for!

And don't just *be* thankful. Actually express that thanksgiving. Thank those God has put in your life for all the things they do for you. Thank your family and friends just for being there. Thank your church family for strengthening your understanding of God's Word. And most of all, thank God in prayer for everything He's given you in body and soul. Thank God for cleansing you in Jesus Christ from the leprosy of sin, for not holding your sins against you for the sake of Jesus. When you pray to God don't just bring requests and petitions, but start by praising the LORD and thanking Him for something in particular. Luther's morning and evening prayers are a great example: "I thank you my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day . . ." As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Col 2:6). And "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God...And the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4:6, 9). In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.