

23 November 2016
Thanksgiving Eve

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“That We May Realize This”

Text: Luke 17:11-19

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

The story of the ten lepers is a familiar one. Jesus heals all ten, but only one - a foreigner, a Samaritan - returns to give thanks. The other nine were ungrateful louts who couldn't be bothered. Or so it is often said.

But that's hard for me to believe. Leprosy was such a terrible disease, a slow death surrounded by others who were also dying slow deaths, separated from family and society, with little or no hope. To be healed of such a disease, to be given your life back again, to be able to go back to your family and town, that was no small thing! And the nine weren't thankful for that? I think they were overwhelmingly, joyously thankful. I think they were like the folks the prophet Malachi once described, those who would *go out leaping like calves from the stall* (Malachi 4:2). Of course they were thankful.

But there was a difference, between the Samaritan and the other nine. But it wasn't that one was thankful and the others not. And it wasn't *who* they thanked - I'm sure they all thanked God for their healing. It was, rather, that the Samaritan realized that to thank God **He should go and fall at the feet of Jesus**. That Jesus wasn't just a prophet who spoke the Word of God, who channeled the Word of God to these lepers - He was the Word of God Himself. God in the flesh. The Saviour. And so the leper falls on his face at Jesus feet - and act of worship.

And by so doing, he receives another gift. A greater healing. For then Jesus says to him: **“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”** But he was already well. And so were the other nine. They had all been healed by the Word of God. So this healing, this wellness, was something more. Something the others did not receive. Not just cleansing from his leprosy, but cleansing from his sin. For what Jesus said there could also be translated in this way: **Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.**

And that story, I think, is a pretty good snapshot of our world today. On our National Day of Thanksgiving, people are thankful - I have no doubt about that. Not just Christians, but believers and unbelievers - peoples of all kinds of faiths and religions, and those with none at all - will gather tomorrow and say what they are thankful for. And they'll mean it. And the lists will undoubtedly be long. In our country, we have a lot to be thankful for.

The difference is like it was for the lepers - knowing who to thank. That the source of all that we have and are thankful for is not us and what we can do and achieve; it is not the inevitable progress of man getting better; and it is not just a generic “god” or the god of all religions, but specifically this God: the God who came to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus. The God who loved you so much that He died for you on the cross in order to give you more than physical healing or blessings of this world and life - but to save you from your sins and give you eternal life. And so the God who gives you Himself. That is the God who is the source of every blessing, and who is truly due our thanks this night.

And that we might do that not just once a year but at all times, that’s what we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. For when we pray *Give us this day our daily bread*, we learn from the catechism that *God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people*, - He’s doing it already, and would, even if we didn’t pray this. He healed all ten lepers and didn’t take His healing back from the nine. - *but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.*

That He would lead us to realize this. That He would lead us - not just other people, but you and me as well, to realize this. To be Samaritan lepers. To open our eyes, our hearts, our minds, not just to *what* we receive, but to realize *who* we receive it all from. To realize all the gifts we have been given. Because its easy to forget or get it wrong. Even for Christians.

We can rejoice in and love what we have rather than the one who gave it.
We can think we’ve earned or deserved something and give ourselves the credit.
We can take all that we have for granted, and the one who gives it all, too.
We can be dissatisfied with what we receive, and grumble for more, for better, for greater, rather than giving thanks.
We can abuse the gifts we receive, using them for sin, using them for evil and wickedness, rather than in gratitude.
We can get busy and distracted, think we have better and more important things to do; things that come before God and receiving His gifts.
We can find ourselves neglecting the gift we have in the truth of God’s Word and believing instead the thoughts and opinions of the world.

And what else? How else? What’s on your list? What other feet do we fall down before instead of the feet who came and walked with us, and then were pierced with nails for us?

And so it is good that we began the service tonight - this *Thanksgiving* service - not by giving thanks, but by repenting. For we do not always realize, though we should. We are not always thankful, though we should be. We do often get it wrong. But by falling at Jesus’ feet and repenting, we then receive this too: the gift of His Word of forgiveness. From the Samaritan leper’s Jesus.

And then we'll end the service tonight by receiving another gift from the Samaritan leper's Jesus. The same Body and Blood that the leper fell on his face before has come for us and we will receive. The Body and Blood that healed us by taking the leprosy of our sin upon Himself and having it take His life instead of ours. The Body and Blood which rose to life again, and now gives that new and death-defeating life to us. So that what Jesus spoke to that Samaritan leper, He now speaks to us: **Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you.** Depart in peace. Your Jesus, the one your faith is in, has saved you.

And so tonight we are reminded. *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* (LSB #892). *Praise Be to Christ* (LSB #538) who gives lavishly and abundantly. And finally, we'll be *Sent Forth By God's Blessing* (LSB #643), His gifts and blessing received again as we receive it each and every day. Apart from whom we have nothing. But with whom we have everything. Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.