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Eve of National Thanksgiving Vienna, VA

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"Natural Causes or Acts of God?"
Text: Luke 17:11-19; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Deuteronomy 8:1-10

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

"Natural causes." You've heard that phrase. It's fairly common in our world today. Things happen by *natural causes*. People die by *natural causes*. Things happen because of *natural causes* - that is, the laws of nature at work. I think this is the vocabulary of the evolutionary thinking that has permeated our world today. Things just happen. The universe, the world, and what happens in it. It's all by *natural causes*.

But the Scriptures don't have that point of view, and would not have us think that way. In the Scriptures, nature is never on its own, doing it own thing, starting things by itself and ending things by itself. Instead of *natural causes*, the Scriptures know of "acts of God." Which is how we used to think more. And which insurance companies still do! When a disaster hits, your policy will say that you are not insured against - <u>not</u> *natural causes*, but *acts of God*.

Things don't just happen or happen by chance when there is a God in heaven. It isn't fate when there is a God who is directing all things to work for our good. And not just to give us good *things* in this life (he may or may not), but to give *life*! An *eternal* life. That's the good He really wants us to have. And so the good He is working for us. Which includes nature and life and death. The winds and waves obey His voice (Matthew 8:27). Our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15). He knows the number of our days (Psalm 139:16) and the number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30). The angels carry out His commands. He is the one who keeps the planets in their orbits and who determines the number of the stars, their names, and sets them in place (Psalm 8:4; 147:4).

So Thanksgiving calls us back. To see and consider once again the hand of God at work in our lives, and therefore to give Him thanks for what he has done. To repent of our "natural causes" thinking and to acknowledge <u>Him</u> as the giver and worker of all good. And to see and acknowledge not just the hand of <u>*a*</u> God, an almighty being, who is someplace far, far away, doing things and pulling strings, a God we don't really know and who doesn't really know us and our needs . . . but the hand of a loving God, a caring God, a giving God, a merciful God, a promising God, a forgiving God. A God who knows us. A God who created us. A God who came to live with us. A God who became one of us. And so the hand of Jesus. The hands that in all those ways were nailed to the

cross for you. The act of God above all acts of God, to work for you the greatest good: the forgiveness of your sins and the promise of eternal life.

Thanksgiving calls us back and to give thanks to such a God.

And in that way be like the one leper. The Samaritan leper. In the story, all ten lepers were healed, cleansed of their leprosy. And I'm sure all ten lepers were thankful. Of course they were; who wouldn't be? What made the one leper, the Samaritan leper, different wasn't that he was the only one that was thankful, but that he is the only one who RETURNED TO JESUS and gave thanks to God *there*, in the flesh and blood of Jesus. To acknowledge that **in Jesus** is the promise-making God who had come to fulfill His promise and save. That's who Jesus is. And so the Samaritan's faith not only ***made him well***, as our English translation put it at the end of the story today; all ten were made well. Rather, and as it would be *better* translated: ***his faith saved him***. That was the gift he received that the others did not.

And it is the gift we receive as well. Lots of people today are thankful. Lots of people celebrate Thanksgiving. Lots of people thank a generic God, a far away God. A God they perhaps don't really know. And it's good to thank God. He is the one who blesses all people, the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:45). Maybe they are like the nine lepers in our story today.

But there is *more* that God wants to give; that He wants to give us in Jesus. For in Jesus, He has come to give us **Himself**. He has come with hands to bless us, to baptize, to heal, to feed, to forgive, to raise, and much more. He has come so that we know Him. Know Him as our Father and Brother, and that we are, by grace, His children. And that, not by any natural causes, but His doing. His hands creating us, redeeming us, and on the Last Day, raising us and taking us to His home and ours.

So we return to give thanks, to our God where He is in His flesh and blood for us today: **here**. We hear His Absolution. We open our mouths to eat and drink his Body and Blood. And we are saved, by grace, through the faith which receives these gifts of God. And in that faith we pray. We make, as Paul said, our ***supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people***. And in that faith, as we heard from Deuteronomy, we ***bless the Lord for all the good He has given us***. Which means to proclaim His name, to acknowledge Him as the giver of every gift, and make Him known. That every person may know Him. Not as a God far away, but a God here. A giving God, a gracious God, a forgiving God. That in days to come, not just one or one-tenth return to give thanks to God in the flesh, but that all might. For that is what God wants, for ***all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth***.

So maybe as we return to give thanks this year, we return *also* to the way the Scriptures speak. To speak no more of *natural causes*, but of the hand of God at work. Working

good. Working salvation. Speaking of Jesus, and rejoicing with the Samaritan leper, in Him.

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