

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of October 11, 2009*

## Thankfulness and Appreciation (Luke 17:11-19)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Our text is from the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke:

“He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, ‘Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ And He said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.’”

This is the Word of God.

Dear friends in Christ, Jesus was traveling with His friends southward toward the Holy City. They were in an area ‘along the border between Samaria and Galilee.’ Throughout the region roaming bands of thieving thugs threatened the highways and, always, beggars seeking alms accosted passersby.

Here Jesus and the Twelve encounter 10 lepers. Leprosy was a debilitating and disfiguring disease. Therefore, the Jews considered lepers unclean and exiled them from all villages after sundown. It says these ten lepers ‘stood at a distance’, too far to have a real conversation in fact. And yet, they call out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

The Lord did not refuse their request. He did not ask their names or where they lived or check their health insurance cards. He sent them to the priests, who had the authority to judge whether a leper was sick or healed.

As they turned to go, “they were cleansed”, says Luke. They had the faith to respond to Jesus’ instructions...but something was missing. Were they too shocked, too surprised to remember their manners? Were they so accustomed to doing what they were told that they did so without a word of gratitude or a question about why? Were they simply rude and ungrateful? One of them, at least could not help but recognize Jesus’ holiness.

“Were not all cleansed?” asked Jesus. “Where are the other nine?” I wonder if this was a comment made in dismay and disappointment or one Jesus said in astonished recognition that their excitement over healing was so great they could not wait to have it officially recognized.

The grateful man, a Samaritan, “praised God with a loud voice and fell on His face at Jesus’ feet giving Him thanks.” One can sense the rush of joy, the depth of a gratitude grounded in faith in Christ that touched every fibre of his being as he bowed before the Lord. It was not a formal act but a spontaneous expression of unrestrained thanksgiving.

One commentator named William Barclay says, "Ingratitude towards God and towards His Son Jesus Christ is the ugliest of all sins and there is no sin of which men are more often and consistently guilty."

I am sure the author of those words is correct. How often do we see the glass half empty? Or how often like the nine lepers do we find ourselves engrossed in our lives and shamelessly too busy to give thanks and praise?

A psychiatrist says there are two kinds of stress in human behaviour. One is destructive. The other gives us vitality and a spring to our step. This "stress" he maintains is found among those who have what we call "an attitude of gratitude." These persons live life gratefully. When we live life that way, giving thanks is not only an expression of words but also is evident in everything we do. Thanksgiving, appreciation, gratitude – not only to one another but mainly to God – these are the hallmarks of Christian life. In light of God's grace to us in Christ this is the attitude that ought to pervade our life as Christians.

As Jesus wondered where the nine thankless lepers were, so He must wonder about us when the gifts He gives are ignored, not recognized, abused, or unappreciated. We are most grateful for health when we become sick; for work when we are unemployed; for food when we are hungry; for family and friends when we are lonely. Shouldn't it be the other way around as well? Shouldn't there be thanksgiving when our health is good, when our job is secure, and when there is food on the table?

How often we take for granted the very simple blessings in life. For example, a 12 year old boy named David Vetter was born without an immune system. He underwent a bone marrow transplant in order to correct the deficiency. Up to that point he had spent his entire life in a plastic bubble in order to prevent exposure to common germs, bacteria, and viruses that could kill him. He lived without ever knowing human contact. When asked what he'd like to do if and when released from his protective bubble, he said, "I want to walk barefoot on grass, and touch my mother's hand." Indeed, how much happier we could be if we thought more about all the things from God we have instead of the things we don't have.

Paul urged the Christians in Philippi to give thanks in everything (Philippians 4:6). He encouraged the Ephesians to always give "thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:20). Jesus, in our text, recognized thanksgiving as that aspect that dares to live dangerously, fearlessly asking God for mercy and then faithfully accepting the gift by turning from an old life to a new one that appreciates the God who gives blessings. It was not that Jesus had hurt feelings about not receiving thanks. Rather, He pitied the nine who did not recognize Him as the Messiah and who failed to give praise to God.

Then Jesus dismissed the humble Samaritan. "Rise," He said, "and go; your faith has made you well." He sent him away, knowing his attitude of gratitude would ignite others. His family would undoubtedly begin praising God with a new zest. How could they help

it? Their loved one was no longer an outcast! His neighbours, perhaps his whole village, would probably repeat the acclaim God deserved. Thanksgiving, you see, is contagious.

There was not much gratitude in the people involved in the crucifixion of our Lord. His disciples did not know what it was all about. Their beloved master was suffering, indeed dying, to pay for their sins. Only after He had risen from the dead could they rejoice and give thanks.

All of His ministry, Jesus was in the business of healing and forgiving. Today He still is. He heals our physical illnesses and our spiritual sickness. He forgives leprosy sins that eat away at our spiritual lives, and He gives us the faith to live a new life of appreciation and thankfulness.

Friends, gratitude flows out of life in the Spirit of God, a new life begun at Baptism and strengthened at the Holy Supper, the Eucharist. The word 'Eucharist' incidentally is a word that means 'thanksgiving'. In essence, we celebrate with appreciation and thanks the death of Jesus for our sins and life of the Spirit in us. So we follow the example of the Samaritan in spontaneous gratitude, in thankful witness. And, as we thank God for all His blessings, we learn to practice gratitude toward one another. True gratitude to God splashes over into our daily life in how we treat each other.

And so, we pray in the words of Paul Gerhardt: "Jesus, your boundless love so true / Unite my thankful heart to you...May your love my hope renew / May your love possess me whole / My joy, my treasure, and my crown! / All coldness from my heart remove / My every act, word, thought be love. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.