

Sermon Thanksgiving Day – October 11, 2015

## Worship in Spirit and Truth

Luke 17:11–19



Dear Friends in Christ,

Thanksgiving is in the air! I can smell it! Actually what we do smell is turkey in the oven and food that many will enjoy today or tomorrow.

When we talk about Thanksgiving Day the first thing that comes to mind is food isn't it. Yes we talk about other things like harvest and thankfulness, but the immediate association we have with Thanksgiving Day is food, then and family gatherings. The fall colors remind, and the picture of a turkey remind us of Thanksgiving Day.

Likewise the Gospel reading for today is like a picture that reminds us of one thing, worship. Yes there is thanksgiving in it. And indeed there is much for which to be thankful. 'Tis the season to be thankful. And we should be thankful in this season and at all times because God has indeed truly blessed us. He has given us "clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all [we] have. He richly and daily provides [us] with all that [we] need to support this body and life. . . . All this he does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in [us]. For all this it is [our] duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him" (explanation of the First Article).

The story in our Gospel reading focuses on the ten lepers.

Leprosy as we know it now, is a chronic infection caused by certain kind of bacteria, and it is primarily a disease of the peripheral nerves system which controls the limbs and organs in the body, and is also a disease of the upper respiratory tract.

As you see it is an inside problem that manifest itself on the outside. This type of leprosy is known as the Hansen's disease, which affects skin and eyes.

In Old Testament times leprosy described not only the Hansen's disease but other kinds of skin infections afflicting not just humans, but also houses and fabric. References to leprosy also included some type of mold or mildew which might affect objects.

Those who were affected by the disease in Old Testament times, were segregated into colonies because of leprosy was highly contagious, and was also considered spiritual problem, preventing the lepers from true worship, the worship Jesus invites us to have, in spirit and truth.

Now a day if untreated, leprosy can progress and cause permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs, and eyes. Now, because of the immune system is compromised by the virus, the body can be infected with other diseases that can result in tissue loss causing fingers and toes to become shortened and deformed.

Now this meditation is not on medical information to be sure but leprosy can point us to that which can prevent us from having a true worship.

We might not, we can't know all the reasons that God allows disease into our lives, but biblical leprosy is a powerful symbol reminding us of sin's spread and its horrible consequences. Like leprosy, sin starts out small but can then spread, leading to other sins and causing great damage to our relationship with God and others, therefore preventing us to truly be thankful and worship as God desires.

Imagine those lepers in our Gospel not only were they suffering from this terrible disease but the consequences of it. They were alienated from their families, their communities, and more problematic if you were a Samaritan. From the perspective of the Jews, the Samaritans were of second class citizens. They shared a bloodline with the Jews but had intermarried extensively with other tribes while the Jews were in captivity, therefore considered of inferior breed from the Jews.

We too dear friends suffer, besides the physical illnesses and diseases, we suffer with spiritual disease that like leprosy infects and slowly prevent us from truly worship God in spirit and truth.

Thanksgiving Day is a good time to re-evaluate the things we have received from God and also to re-evaluate our worship.

How is your thanksgiving? Is it only for the food you eat? What about family, health, friends, your community, your country, yourself and most importantly your salvation?

The lepers as much as they wanted to worship God at the temple and as much as they wanted to be with their families and be a normal member of the community but because of their sickness they were shun, they were rejected. Life must have been truly difficult first by their physical problem and second by the rejection of family, society and religious leaders.

In the same way leprosy of the soul can prevent us from worshipping in spirit and in truth and from a fruitful relationship with God and with one another.

We know that that leprosy virus in us is sin, but sin can take different forms and as somewhere along the way that virus can evolve into infections that corrode us from inside out. Unforgiveness is something that starts sometimes slowly but many people ruin their health and their lives by taking the poison of bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness. And if we don't forgive we get turned over to the torturers. It is a torture to have hateful thoughts toward another person rolling around inside your head, messing up with worship, after all Jesus taught us: "forgive us as we forgive others."

Another leprosy like-virus is our bad habits, habits that might be destroying our physical bodies or our relationships with our family and friends. Whatever it might be, alcohol, gambling, workaholic, and so on, those too will prevent us from having true thanksgiving and certainly true worship in the spirit and truth.

Is there any unforgiveness in you? Any bad habits? You are dealing with? Let's learn from the lepers in our Gospel lesson for today.

Notice what they did. They "lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

Does that sound familiar? Lord have mercy? In today's worship we did sing Lord have mercy, it is the Kyrie Eleisen, Lord have mercy and right after the Kyrie, we

did sing the hymn of praise. As you see the right worship starts where Jesus is and what He does.

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (v 13) they said, and when Jesus “saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.”

The lepers cry for mercy and Jesus does hear their cry, then they obey Jesus words and command, then on their way to show themselves to the priests, they realize there are healed. Only then thanksgiving springs up from the Samaritan leper.

Kyrie Eleisen, Lord have mercy! That’s the prayer we sing in God’s house every time we gather in the Divine Service. And that’s the prayer we should pray in the silence of our hearts as well.

God does listen to our prayers of confession and repentance. And praying Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy on me that I’m suffering from unforgiveness, have mercy on me that my bad habits are destroying me and my family, my spiritual life.

God hears us, and the more we pray for mercy the more we will see our lives changed, and the more we will worship in spirit and in truth.

That’s what the Samaritan leper realized, that’s why he came back to thank Jesus for what he was receiving. This Samaritan was now healed, not only was he going to be accepted in his circle and the rest of society but now he could worship properly and freely at the temple.

“Rise and go your way,” Jesus says to him; “your faith,” it may well be translated, “has saved you” (v 19). He is saved. His faith has saved him.

We have this same faith, don’t we? After the Kyrie, the worship of the nine lepers and the worship of the Samaritan, our worship, take separate routes. The nine lepers duck out early. They hurry off to the priests to be declared clean, while the Samaritan turns back to Jesus, the Great High Priest, to be declared righteous. Jesus asks: “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?” (v 17), for Jesus had much more yet to offer. He offers himself on behalf of the whole world in his coming death on the cross. He offers eternal salvation.

Sometimes that’s what we look for isn’t it. Something that will excite us in the moment even if that means entertaining us, but we don’t look past to what Jesus really offers.

In this time of thanksgiving, we are mindful of certain of God’s gifts: memories from this past summer’s vacation, the beauty of the changing seasons, the bounty from our gardens and fields, healing or continued good health. But what about the gifts offered to us right here in this place? We call our Sunday morning service the Divine Service because here in this place God serves us. He serves us in the gifts of the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament. Then after serving us he sends out in obedience to His word, but when His words work in each of us, thanks giving and praise is found in our mouths and in our actions towards God and towards others.

How many of us ignore, or even despise, these gifts by ducking out early, failing to show up at all, or being otherwise unfaithful in our attendance at the preaching of the Word and the reception of the Lord’s Supper? How many of us fail to acknowledge that Jesus is here present with us, where two or three are gathered, where his Word is proclaimed, where we celebrate his Supper? As children of our heavenly Father, from

whom we receive every good thing in our earthly lives, we do right to turn back to Christ and join the Samaritan praising God with a loud voice.

We do this very thing in our worship in what it's called the Hymn of Praise. Where the great work of Christ is recognized, sang and praised. For He is the one who hears our prayers for mercy, He is the one who send His Son His only Son the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world. Who dies on the cross of Calvary so that your sins are forgiven, so that you are shown mercy so that you are healed.

Next, the Samaritan fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. In this, he acknowledged in faith that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is God, that Jesus as God performed this healing miracle and also saved him from all his sins. He fell at His feet! Isn't that a humble act of praising?

As the Samaritan prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus, acknowledging that he was in the presence of God, some worshipers today bow deeply in some parts of worship, or even when they talk to God in prayer.

Jesus finally dismisses the Samaritan by pointing him to his faith, which itself is a gift of God. "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." But, yes, Jesus' words could indeed be translated, perhaps better, "Arise, journey; your faith has saved you"<sup>1</sup> Jesus is here referring not to the healing that has taken place but to eternal salvation through faith in him.

Today we observe Thanksgiving Sunday. A day to give thanks! We are to be thankful for all the fruits of the earth that we receive every day and for this great season of harvest. The once again we see that the Lord sends us not with empty hands but even if the harvest has been average or slightly below average, with the Lord there is always plentiful!

But above all we do praise God for His mercy, for the forgiveness of sins, and for the faith to receive all these gifts, that moves us to truly worship in spirit and in truth, here in this house of prayer, but from here at home, at school, and even in our leisure time. In our journey, always coming back to this place to recognize the miracle that Jesus operates in each one of our lives through His words and the gifts of grace of baptism and Holy Communion.

Worship in this faith is true worship, worship in spirit and truth, worship in the name of Jesus, worship where Jesus is present, worship in the faith that clings to Jesus and his saving work. Here is our faith, our worship.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> (Arthur A. Just Jr., Luke 9:51–24:53, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 1997], 648).