

## **Giving Thanks for his healing Grace**

Luke 17:11–19

Dear friends in Christ, grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is Thanksgiving Sunday. This is the time for us to give thanks for all God's blessings, especially for another year of crops and harvesting. God has been good to us. And now we gather to give thanks.

Thankfulness is the opposite of self-centeredness. One cannot be both thankful and self-centered at the same time. Just as impossible as it is for darkness to be light, or for Christ and Satan to agree, so it is for the giving of thanks and self-centeredness. A thankful person must acknowledge that he was in need, that someone was merciful to him, and that this person should be recognized for his mercy. A self-centred person will have a hard time to recognize the mercy or will take that mercy for granted, or say thank you with out really being thankful.

Giving thanks comes from the heart, it is a matter of the heart that recognized the donor. That's what Thanksgiving is and should be. And yes! We celebrate and give thanks even as we gather for food! For all we receive are God's bounteous gifts.

Giving thanks is the result of God's work for us. Just look at the lepers in our Gospel text: "As [Jesus] entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'" (vv 12–13). These lepers knew they had great need. They were outcasts. Their whole life was spent separated from people. They could not enter the temple or the Israelite camp in their condition. They were ritually unclean. That meant these lepers had to

stand away. Keep their distance. Not get close. It's clear that the lepers in our text knew they were in great need.

But when Jesus came and cleansed them something amazing takes place. Wonderful mercy! Jesus heard their desperate cry and showed great kindness. Not only were these ten men healed. They were also now cleansed. They could go to the priests, who could examine them and call them clean once more! Then, they could offer the sacrifices the Law required and be restored once again to the temple, along with being restored to other people!

Now, we know how the text goes. One leper returns to give thanks to Jesus, and he was a Samaritan. The others don't. Jesus sent them to the priests. But if you look at our text carefully, Luke doesn't say whether those nine lepers made it to the priests or not. Apparently, that didn't matter. What matters is they did not come back to give Jesus thanks. They could not acknowledge his great mercy for them, nor did they care to bring recognition for Jesus' mercy. How unthankful! How self-centered! How self-righteous!

This is what we are reminded about on Thanksgiving Day, that we are to give thanks for God's mercy and other provisions. That we move from our self-centered attitude, or from taking things for granted, and focus on the giver and provider.

Now, I think the Gospel reading also points to something that is good to remember and trust, that God also heals our physical maladies. All through the Gospels we see Jesus operating all kinds of miracles, and many of those miracles, most of them in fact, are healing miracles. We see through them that God does care about our physical condition, and not just

food, but our whole well being. And Jesus demonstrated this by healing the ten leper infected people.

We don't know if they understood God's heart for our well being, all Dr. Luke tells us in his gospel is that they recognized Jesus, that he has worked miracles at other times, even healed other leper infected people. So, they cry out to him.

Dr. Luke tells us that this happened as Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and passing the border between Samaria and entering Galilee. "And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance..."

Hearing that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, is important to note, because of the relations between the Samaritans and the Jews. You probably know how the Jews and Israelites back then treated each other. Imagine this, put some children from Samaria-Israel and some from Jerusalem-Jews, how would their fights go... You Samaritan pig, we are better than you! My father says that you are not God's real people. We are better because we have the true temple. The Samaritan would say, you think that because you have the temple you are better, but you are just hypocrites, you don't know what you are saying... And so the verbal fight continues. But that's what the actual relationship these two people had. But that didn't prevent either Jesus from performing a miracle, and the lepers to cry for Jesus, for one of them is Samaritan. The reality is that when people are overcome with any life crisis, as in this case where ten people were infected with leprosy, people gather. These ten lepers overcame a barrier, they become a community with a united cause, so to speak, they were in the same boat, leprosy. And as with any sickness it

doesn't matter who the target is, rich or poor, they will be affected just the same.

The Jewish law in those days required that a person with the onset of leprosy was to present himself or herself to the priest. They had the instructions how to determine leprosy and the authority to declare the patient "unclean," and then isolate that person from the rest of the community, to avoid spreading the sickness. However, the isolation in some cases felt more like being expelled from the community. Having leprosy meant that person wasn't spiritually and religiously fit, the patient would be considered a sinner, unworthy to be with the rest.

Once the disease had run its course, then the patient was required to go back to the priest so he could verify that the sickness is gone, be declared healthy again, and thereafter being pronounced "clean," and from there be restored back to their community.

Being in isolation, or worse being declared unclean, would be detrimental to the one who suffers that kind of sickness. So when these ten lepers hear that Jesus was coming by they cry out: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." "Help us! Heal us!" This is unbearable but no one else would have mercy on us, but you will. Jesus, Master, have mercy on us! Jesus does. He stops, listens to the cries, sees them and has mercy on them.

It is done, mercy is given. Only, the miracle is not seen in the moment, instead Christ directs them to "see the priests." But that must have been disheartening. Why would Jesus do that. But they obey and, on their way, to see the priest, all of the 10 are healed. Now that obedience was really faith. Faith in the one who perform miracles. Jesus.

Jesus didn't care about political divisions, and the fact that one of the lepers was a Samaritan. He did just that, healed them all the same. His action, his work of miracle, was God's love and mercy for them, and their obeying Jesus words was an act of faith. That's how we are to worship God, trust and obey him. By faith.

It is in that same faith that today we come to Christ for healing. Yes, we do come in thanksgiving, that's our primary objective this morning. But knowing and trusting that Jesus hears our cries, and our desire to receive help, we pray for the sick this morning.

It is also the also at the instruction of the Scriptures to pray for healing, to cry out for God's mercy. James instructs us: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:14-15)

This is great news, our sins have been forgiven, now we lift you in prayer. The elders and Pastors will pray for you. We cry to Jesus together.

Now, of course we do recognize that all healing comes from God, and we do not presume to be able to heal anyone by our own power, righteousness, or authority. We gratefully acknowledge and affirm the gifts God gives through medicine and the work of doctors and medical technicians because that too is an answer to our prayers. But we do seek God first, and knowing that he does answer prayers, we wait in him for his healing. We know that as he healed the lepers along the way, along our journey, the healing will be experienced.

Our prayer for healing this morning is no substitute for either medicine or the proper care of one's health. For we know that those areas

too, are God's gifts for healing and care. In all we do, we trust in God's promises especially his grace in sustaining us during our times of trials, sickness, and pain.

And whenever God heals us, either here and now, or for eternity as he calls us home, we are to give thanks. Just like the Samaritan did. The Gospel reading tells us: "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." Like him we worship God, we praise him in thanksgiving for his provisions and for healing.

Jesus asks "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

The Samaritan didn't respond. There is nothing but silence. Why? Because this Samaritan seeing he'd been cleansed, is now worshipping before Christ who has appeared before him. He knew that he was well, he was redeemed, when despised by others, in Christ he found a welcoming grace and peace.

May we be blessed today, with the same welcoming grace, with peace and may we worship God in Thanksgiving for all his benefits, including the restoration of our health.

In His name, amen.