



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 23, 2006

Thanksgiving Day

Luke 17:11-19

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 100

Second Lesson: Philippians 4:10-20

Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

Give Thanks to God

I think it was Tuesday morning when there was a radio show on and the two men on the radio show were in a heated debate about Thanksgiving. There were two things that they were debating and arguing about. One—when during the meal should you stop and talk about what you are thankful for? One said after desserts and one said before something else, I don't remember what it was. The other point was can you leave the TV on while you are doing all that, having the meal and giving thanks? They went back and forth and back and forth and it got kind of heated and I thought to myself, "I think this maybe misses the point a little bit." I don't think God is real happy to hear us arguing about exactly how we give thanks and when we do it and whether or not there is a TV on. Sure TV can be distracting, and that is why I am kind of happy when I don't see any of you holding a TV when I am standing up here preaching on a Sunday morning. But the whole idea of arguing about giving thanks just seems kind of silly.

We have come here this morning to gather together to give thanks to our God. As we look at these Words, our God really teaches something about what we are here to do and what we are to do when we leave here. If we want to talk about giving thanks to the Lord, return and give thanks to God which he talks about in our reading, we learn first of all that it comes from being thankful, but also as we look at this Word of God this morning we see that it is more than just *being* thankful. That is the truth that our God teaches us today.

Jesus we are told was walking along the border between Galilee and Samaria. He had been in Galilee for some time and he was going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was the last Passover he would celebrate with his disciples. He was going to Jerusalem to die. If you read through the gospels, he talks often about setting his face towards Jerusalem because he knows that he is going there to die. On the way, you didn't go just straight south from Galilee down to Jerusalem, you go south until you hit the Galilee/Samaria border like it said, then you travel east across the Jordan, go on the other side of the Jordan down to about where Jericho had been and then cross the Jordan again and then go up the hills in Jerusalem. That was just the accepted route because of the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans.

So as Jesus is traveling that route, kind of towards the beginning of it, he had just gone south a little ways and he comes near the border. As he is coming into a village, there were some people that weren't in the village—some people that had to stay outside of the village—these ten lepers. You are probably very familiar with the story. You know the lepers had to stay outside of the camp. This is what God had said in Leviticus 13. If

someone was found with a skin disease, they had to go and show themselves to the priest. If the priest determined it was infectious, you had to stay outside of the camp until it was gone. So leprosy was an all-encompassing term for any kind of these different skin diseases, but there were other things where God had said, "Here is what you have to do when the priest says that you have some kind of infectious skin disease. You have to keep your hair unkempt. You have to tear your clothes. You have to stay at a distance from anyone and anytime someone gets close, you have to shout 'unclean, unclean.'"

It might sound like walking by your kid's room, something that is unkempt and shouting "unclean, unclean," but it is not the same thing. It is people that are separated from their families, separated from their homes, separated from their relatives, and separated from their way of life. It makes sense that if you find ten of them they would be together, because they would be looking for some kind of companionship, right? It would be a miserable existence until you could go back to the camp if the disease would go away. Some of them did and some of them didn't.

So these ten men stay at a distance because they can't come closer. It is forbidden by God. They cry out in a loud voice, "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us!*" (Luke 17:13). Evidently from his ministries in Galilee they had learned something about Jesus. They had heard about his power to heal. They maybe had also heard about his powerful teaching that wasn't like the teachers of the Law. They recognized him as someone who had the power, the ability, and now they are praying, the desire to help them. So they cry out in that loud voice and Jesus answers them, not by rubbing some dirt in some water and making some mud and putting it on the disease or anything like that, not by saying, "Shazam, you are healed" or anything like that—he simply says, "*Go, show yourselves to the priests*" (Luke 17:14).

You had to go show yourself to the priest so the priest could say that you were cleansed so that you could go back to your regular life. You notice here how Jesus, who said he came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, even down to this last little detail fulfills all of the Law that God had given—the ceremonial law, the civil law, the moral law—he fulfilled it all. He did it in our place.

Put yourself in the shoes of these guys. You are calling out to the One you have heard do all these incredible things and he says to you to go show yourself to the priest. What is the first thing you are going to do after he tells you to go show yourself to the priest? Are you going to look at where the infection or the disease is? Notice what it says. When you look at it after he says, "*Go, show yourselves to the priests*" (Luke 17:14), do you see any change in their skin yet? It said they were healed on the way, right? Think about these ten men. It took an act of faith in Jesus to start going to the priest, didn't it? There was no visible evidence of any change yet. Do you think that they might have been tempted to say, "Jesus, wait a minute. It's still all here. Why go show myself to the priest?"

When God tells you and me to put our trust in his promises, don't we at times say to him, "God, wait a minute. Why? Do something first and then I will put my trust in you." Sometimes we want to debate God on the best way for him to do what it is that he is

going to do. We are not told that these men did this. Think about this act of faith on their part that they can't see anything with their eyes, but Jesus said it and they go to the priest. This is an act of faith of all ten of these men.

As they go, put yourself in their shoes again, you are walking to the priest, do you think that maybe you are asking each other, "Why are we going? There isn't anything different. This is a wasted trip." Then you start looking at the guy next to you and you notice there is a little difference in him. You look down at your own self and you say, "Hey! It's all gone! I'm completely healed!" Think of what that would mean for you. Now you can go back to your family. Now you can throw your arms around your children and bounce them on your knee again. You can go back into your life. Do you want me to think that none of these other nine were thankful for what God had done for them? I have to believe every last one of them was thankful because this was a momentous change for them. Can you see yourself picking up your pace? The dust on the path from your sandals is coming up a little quicker and a little higher because you are going a little faster to get to the priest so he can say you are clean and you can get back to your family and do all those things. It's kind of like the way the people drive this weekend, right?

Returning and giving thanks to the Lord comes from being thankful. These men had something to be thankful for towards Jesus and towards their God. These men had demonstrated their faith in Jesus and their God. You have to believe they were thankful.

For you and me, we come together this morning because we are thankful. Returning and giving thanks to God comes from being thankful. The greatest thing that you and I have to give thanks for isn't all the food we will gorge ourselves on. It isn't all the blessings we receive during the course of the year—the physical blessings. The greatest thing you and I have to give thanks for is that our God has taken away sin. Jesus kept every last one of those laws perfectly, as we mentioned, but then he took every last one of those times that you and I haven't on his back and he carried them to the cross. Then he sent the Holy Spirit through water, through the Word, through wine, through wafer, into our hearts to create faith and strengthen faith that Jesus is more than just a miracle worker. Jesus is our Redeemer and our Savior. He bought us back from the hell that we have earned by our own actions. That is what makes us thankful.

As we gather together this morning we can think about all the other things our Lord does because God's grace doesn't stop at just the greatest blessing. Our God also showers us with very small blessings and some larger blessings, but abundant blessings. As Paul said, "God will meet all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ." Our God does more than that. Look at all the things that we have to be thankful for spiritually as a congregation—the blessings we have spiritually of people that serve, of people that give of their time, of people that are willing to go the extra mile to do extra things. It is amazing. It is something to stop and be thankful for as we see the physical blessings we have. Those come and go, don't they? Maybe for yourself as you look back this year there are some physical things that tear your heart out. Some difficulties, some challenges, some tragedies—but here is where it is so important that being thankful flows from our forgiveness of sins, because our physical circumstances

can change. Being thankful for the forgiveness of sins is a certainty that you and I go to bed with every night and that we wake up with every morning. As we walk through our day, we know it. It is there. Christ took away our sins. That is why you and I can always be thankful no matter what our outward circumstances are; and when God chooses to bless us with more abundant physical blessings, that is another reason that we can be thankful.

But returning and giving thanks to the Lord is more than just being thankful. That is what leads us to do it. It is also acting. It is also doing. I think Jesus teaches us that when that one guy stops in his tracks and comes back and praises God in a loud voice for everyone to hear. He throws himself in the dirt and says, "I am nothing. You are everything." It is his act of worship before God and he thanks him for what Jesus has done for him. Jesus asks the question, "*Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?*" (Luke 17:17). I think Jesus looks for us to be more than just *being* thankful. He looks for us to *act* on our thankfulness and to put that thankfulness into action by putting our faith into action. He says to this guy, "*Rise and go; your faith has made you well*" (Luke 17:19). That is the same thing he says to us every time we come to the Lord's Supper. That is the same thing he says to us every time we confess our sins and hear the pronouncement of forgiveness—"Rise and go; the faith God has given you has made you holy."

But think about how we act on that faith. This guy acted on it by stopping in his tracks and going back and giving thanks to God. Okay, we have stopped in our tracks this morning and came here to praise God and to offer him our thanks, and that is a wonderful thing. Yet, that isn't where it ends, is it? Your faith has made you whole. How we give thanks, the things that we do to give thanks is what demonstrates the faith that is in our heart.

I have to believe you have a bunch of gizmos and gadgets at home that have that little green LED light on it—some kind of light that indicates if it is a low battery or things like that. You know what I am talking about. Could you imagine if God built you and me that once we came to faith there was a green/yellow indicator light on us and other people could see how strong our faith is at that point in time or how weak our faith is at that point in time? Think about it. If you put it on your neck where people could see it, do you think you would find yourself saying, "I have to buy more turtlenecks and cover that puppy up!" I have to admit there are times that I would have to. There are times when my faith isn't as strong as God would have it be with the way he is giving me his Word and the Sacraments. But faith that God gives, whether it is weak or strong or mature, is what forgives our sins.

As our faith grows, there will be more often that we will stop and give thanks to the Lord in our regular actions. We will stop and give thanks to the Lord by serving joyfully and willfully without complaining. We will serve our Lord by making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace and not let petty things lead to disagreements between us as members of God's family. We will put the interests of others ahead of our own.

When our green light is glowing brightly, we will do that gladly and willingly. Some days when it is not so bright, we do it because we know it is right, but we aren't real happy about doing it. But the more that we spend recognizing all the reasons that we have to be thankful, the more we will want to be with God and his Word and Sacrament, the more we will want to rejoice in what he has done for us, and then that will lead us to do those things that are pleasing to him and to give thanks to him—not just when we are in the church service, but as we go out and as we deal with one another in our daily lives as we serve wherever God has placed us in our lives.

That is the whole point that those guys arguing about giving thanks on Thanksgiving, after dessert or before the first course, really missed. You and I when we loosen the belt later today, we are going to be giving thanks to God somehow or some way by how we conduct ourselves. Tomorrow morning when we get up and go and do whatever it is we are going to do, we will be giving thanks to God by how we are conducting ourselves, and the day after that and the day after that and the day after that.

You and I have every reason to do it joyfully, willfully and with a heart that just rejoices that we are God's forgiven children.