

Prayer of Illumination

Draw us close, Holy Spirit, as the Scriptures are read and the Word is proclaimed. Let the word of faith be on our lips and in our hearts and let all other words slip away. May there be one voice we hear today — the voice of truth and grace. Amen.

Luke 17:11-19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back and praised God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Title: Giving Thanks – “Entrusted to Act” in reflection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life Together.”

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Preacher: Edward Bellis

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Thanksgiving draws near, and with it, the familiar rhythm of preparation. The table is set, the smells rise from the kitchen, and the family gathers. Each year this ritual reminds us of something far greater than the meal itself. The table is not only a place of eating but a sign of grace. It is the place where gratitude and community meet.

My mother used to say, “Will you return thanks?” My father would ask, “Will you say grace?” In their words, two truths came together: thanksgiving and grace belong to the same act. To give thanks is to recognize grace. To recognize grace is to live thankfully.

The word we use for the Lord’s Supper — *Eucharist* — means “thanksgiving.” At that table, as at our own, we discover that gratitude is not an emotion but an act of faith. It is the confession that everything — our bread, our breath, our very being — comes from God’s hand. The Christian table is therefore never ours alone; it is entrusted to us as stewards of God’s abundance.

The *Eucharist* — our great Thanksgiving — teaches us this truth: that grace draws us together, that gratitude is not merely a sentiment but a form of discipleship. To receive the bread and cup is to say, *I am not my own; I am entrusted to Christ and to my neighbor.*

At the table, our Lord’s Table, we experience God’s amazing grace and are entrusted to share God’s gifts with others. Luke tells us that ten lepers called to Jesus from a distance: “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*” They stood far off — not only from him, but from life itself. Sickness had made them strangers to their families, their work, their worship, and even to their own bodies. They were alive yet cut off from the living.

And still, they called out.

Our faith begins with such a cry — a trust that even from the margins, God hears.

Jesus answered them not with a touch or a visible sign, but with a word: “*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*” It was a command that demanded obedience before it was understood. And our text “*as they went,*” the Gospel says, “*they were cleansed.*”

Bonhoeffer once wrote that only those who **obey truly believe**, and only those who believe truly obey. The lepers’ healing began in their obedience. The lepers walked in faith before they were healed. Their steps became their prayer. Their movement was their “Amen.” Their act of walking became THEIR place of grace. Yet, lest we forget, something stunning happens. Only one returns, and it is not who we expect. The one who returns is a Samaritan, who a good Jew would not include. Yet, Jesus’ grace does not discriminate and reaches across the barriers that separated the Jews from their excluded cousins.

Let’s notice the one who returns. Of the ten who were healed, one returned. He came back with a loud voice, glorifying God, and fell at Jesus’ feet in gratitude. The others went on, healed in body but not yet made whole. To return in thanksgiving is to stand on that ground — to live in gratitude that entrusts us to act, gratitude that joins the work that breaks down barriers and points

us to God's justice. One did return, and the one who returned was a Samaritan — an outsider twice over. Let that sink in. He was not only ostracized because of his disease, but he was also excluded because of his place of birth. Yet it was he who recognized that grace demands response. Thanksgiving is not optional; it is the completion of faith.

To return and give thanks is to acknowledge that we are not our own; we are part of something greater. Life is given; health is given; breath is given. Gratitude is the act by which we confess that all is grace.

The nine did nothing “wrong.” They continued on their way. But the one who returned discovered something the others missed: the joy of a relationship with Jesus Christ. He was not only healed — **he was seen** by the one who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and performed the miracles of calming the stormy sea. Our returning Samaritan entered into communion.

Today, Jesus' question still echoes: “*Where are the nine?*” Let us be clear! Jesus' words are not condemnation, but invitation. Will we be among those who return? Will we see the thankful stranger and offer her grace?

We face difficult times. We are in a **time of trial** as a Jesus-following congregation in a world that is struggling with the stranger, the foreigner. How can we be thankful in our time of trial? Is there someone we can turn to who came through a dark time? Yes, we know someone like that. Today's final hymn was written by a German pastor named Martin Rinkart, who lived through the wars and plagues of 17th-century Germany. He buried thousands, including his own family. Yet amid that suffering, he wrote:

*“Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices.”*

Rinkart understood what many of us forget: Thanksgiving is not the result of comfort, but of trust. Gratitude is not born in abundance but in faith that God has not turned away. Rinkart's thanksgiving was not a denial of suffering; it was defiance of despair. Gratitude in the midst of loss is the faith that God has not turned away.

Friends, gratitude is not just a spiritual concept — it is a political one. Like the Samaritans' witness, to give thanks while the world despises you is to proclaim that God is greater than every Pharaoh, every system of oppression. Our return to Jesus and the cross is the event of liberation, where we who are lost discover our dignity in God's suffering love.

Our thanksgiving is a dangerous word, a powerful witness. It means saying, “I will not let the world's cruelty define my soul. I will still rejoice in the God who hears our cry and the cry of God's oppressed children.”

To give thanks in the midst of pain is to confess that God still sees. It is to join our voice to the one leper's — the one who returned. We are entrusted to act together.

We are entrusted to live together as the people of God, living from grace and toward gratitude. We are not self-made; we are entrusted. Entrusted with bread that we did not grow, with mercy we did not earn, with life we cannot sustain on our own.

In a world anxious with scarcity, the church's task is to remember our abundance. Our thanksgiving is not a sentiment, but one witnessed through our obedience. When we pray, when we share bread, when we give thanks, we bear witness that Christ is present among us.

Paul wrote, *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* Such thanksgiving is not an escape from the world but a faithful presence within it.

So, as we gather this Thanksgiving — around crowded tables or quiet ones — and as we make our decisions about our 2026 pledges, may we remember that gratitude is not complete until it becomes action. Like the returning Samaritan, we are called to return to Jesus and give thanks and our service, not only with our treasures, but also with our time and talents.

We are entrusted — not to hoard blessings but to share them. We are tasked with acting, serving, and loving. Bonhoeffer teaches us that life together is a gift sustained only by grace. As we celebrate with the healed Samaritan, let us remember that God's grace must break the barriers that separate us from one another. Remember that Jesus' call to love one another is a different kind of love, an active love that brings people of radically different backgrounds together.

Whether we sit down at our tables this week and we “return thanks” or say grace, may our hearts be moved and extend beyond the table. May it become a movement — from words to deeds, from comfort to courage, from blessing to service.

To live thankfully is to live faithfully. To live faithfully is to be entrusted is to act. To be entrusted to act in love is to glorify the Giver of every good gift.