

## Giving Thanks Properly

Luke 17:11-19

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

November 21, 2018 – Thanksgiving Eve

† † † † † † †

In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The ten men in this evening's Gospel text, they all suffered from a particular malady – a malady well-known both to them and to the society in which they lived. They were lepers – a fact which no doubt occupied most of their attention, and shaped every aspect of their life – for not only does this disease eat away person's flesh and leave behind oozing, ugly, disgusting sores – but it also separates that person from the rest of the world. It makes him an outcast – undesirable and forgotten – and finally takes his life. So when these ten lepers petitioned Jesus, begging Him to have pity on them, they knew full well the thing for which they asked. And Jesus answered their prayer without hesitation. "Go, show yourselves to the priest," He said. And as they went, they were healed!

Now you would think that the gratitude of these men would have been so great that all of them to a person would have returned to give thanks for the miraculous healing they had received – but in fact it was only one of them who returned give our Lord thanks. Now I'm sure that there's much theological "hay" which could be made from the fact that this man was a Samaritan, as well as the only one to return and give thanks. But for our purposes tonight I'd like to direct your attention elsewhere – namely to the fact that this man realized his need, God met that need, and thus he returned to thank God by throwing himself at Jesus' feet.

This text teaches us one important fact in that regard – that is, that thankfulness to God hangs on two hinges. The first hinge is the realization that we all have needs which have to be met, and secondly that God alone is the only One who is able to fulfill them. The thankful leper, of course, would have had no reason to give thanks to Jesus if he hadn't first realized

his frightful, leprous condition. And likewise we sinners would have no need to give our thanks to God for His salvation if we didn't first recognize our great sin and unworthiness. What this means is that you, dear saints, would have no reason to be here in God's House tonight praying your prayers of thanksgiving were it not for the blessed, God-given realization that you need the things which God has brought you here to receive. Now in the leper's case, his need led to a *direct* act on Jesus' part – which in turn brought about an outward, observable expression of thankfulness for Jesus' mercy and care on the leper's part as he knelt at Jesus' feet.

But this Scripture isn't just about this one particular leper – or even a group of lepers, for that matter. This Scripture applies equally to all of you as well – for like these lepers, each one of you also has some particular, acute need. And you know what that need is better than anyone else – whether it be a health need, financial, or whatever. And, in addition, there are also needs common to all – like food, drink, shelter, safety, companionship, compassion – and yes, forgiveness. So recognizing those needs – whatever they might be for you personally – you should watch closely and observe what happened to that leper who returned to give thanks.

There is a difference between what this leper experienced and what you experience. What I mean is, that while this leper had our Lord's voice spoken *directly* into his ears when Jesus said: "Go, show yourself to the priest," Jesus meets your needs *indirectly*. Or, putting it another way, Jesus meets your needs through *others*. He provides you with parents, employment, or other benefits in order to feed, clothe, and shelter you. He places other people in your life – and not just so that they can serve you,

but so that you, in return, might also serve them! He gives you His Sacraments and the preached Word of the Gospel to bestow eternal life and guard you against any doubts that your sins are truly forgiven before our Father in heaven. So then, while Jesus at one time acted *directly* to serve the leper in this text, He now works *indirectly* to serve you. Still, the action is the same. Your need is what prompts Jesus to act, which in turn leads to thankfulness on your part – whereupon, like the leper, you throw yourself at Jesus’ feet and thank Him.

But how can you even begin to measure all the things our Lord has done for you? How can you take stock, not only of those great gifts of life and salvation through His suffering, cross and resurrection, but also of the countless lesser gifts He so abundantly and patiently provides? I’d like to suggest that the Lord’s Prayer – that perfect prayer which our Lord Jesus Himself taught us to pray – might be a good starting point, because in it you have a summary of everything for which you ought to be thankful. There is no need which cannot be found in one of the petitions of this prayer. And, there is no need mentioned in this prayer which our Lord won’t meet – indeed, which He hasn’t already met in His suffering, death and resurrection!

Do you fear for employment or livelihood? – then pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Do you struggle with guilt from sins long past? – then pray: “Forgive us our trespasses.” Do you suffer weakness, doubt, or depression of any sort? – then pray: “Lead us not into temptation,” and: “Deliver us from evil.” But when you pray, pray with the understanding that your needs are what moves Jesus into action – which in turn leads to thankfulness on your part.

When you pray in the First Petition: “Hallowed be Thy Name,” thank God that His name *is* indeed holy, and that He *has* given His name to you in Baptism so that you might share in His holiness. When you pray: “Forgive us our trespasses,” thank God that your trespasses and sins *have* truly been forgiven – and that our Lord Jesus has become *the* Trespasser for us all, bearing the debt of your sin upon His cross. When you pray: “Give us this day our daily bread,” do so with the thankful realization that God *does* open His hands to satisfy the desires of every living thing.

*This*, dear Christian, *this* is how you ought to pray – not because you have to, but because you are able to. You pray your prayers of thanksgiving, not because you are a small child who still has to learn proper manners, but because you have been given new life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. You pray your thanks because this is what faith does – this is what faith is – this is what faith looks like. You pray because you know God has cured the leprosy of your sin, provided meat for your table and clothing for your body. You pray because you know a much greater home awaits you in heaven than the one in which you now live. You pray because your greatest need has led to Jesus’ action – and indeed, because of the promise of His Father and His great love for us fallen sinners, He has acted mightily for you – and always will act – for His name’s sake, and because of who He is – the only Savior of sinners – your Savior and mine. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

## Giving Thanks Properly

Luke 17:11-19

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

November 21, 2018 – Thanksgiving Eve

† † † † † † †

In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The ten men in this evening's Gospel text, they all suffered from a particular malady – a malady well-known both to them and to the society in which they lived. They were lepers – a fact which no doubt occupied most of their attention, and shaped every aspect of their life – for not only does this disease eat away person's flesh and leave behind oozing, ugly, disgusting sores – but it also separates that person from the rest of the world. It makes him an outcast – undesirable and forgotten – and finally takes his life. So when these ten lepers petitioned Jesus, begging Him to have pity on them, they knew full well the thing for which they asked. And Jesus answered their prayer without hesitation. "Go, show yourselves to the priest," He said. And as they went, they were healed!

Now you would think that the gratitude of these men would have been so great that all of them to a person would have returned to give thanks for the miraculous healing they had received – but in fact it was only one of them who returned give our Lord thanks. Now I'm sure that there's much theological "hay" which could be made from the fact that this man was a Samaritan, as well as the only one to return and give thanks. But for our purposes tonight I'd like to direct your attention elsewhere – namely to the fact that this man realized his need, God met that need, and thus he returned to thank God by throwing himself at Jesus' feet.

This text teaches us one important fact in that regard – that is, that thankfulness to God hangs on two hinges. The first hinge is the realization that we all have needs which have to be met, and secondly that God alone is the only One who is able to fulfill them. The thankful leper, of course, would have had no reason to give thanks to Jesus if he hadn't first realized

his frightful, leprous condition. And likewise we sinners would have no need to give our thanks to God for His salvation if we didn't first recognize our great sin and unworthiness. What this means is that you, dear saints, would have no reason to be here in God's House tonight praying your prayers of thanksgiving were it not for the blessed, God-given realization that you need the things which God has brought you here to receive. Now in the leper's case, his need led to a *direct* act on Jesus' part – which in turn brought about an outward, observable expression of thankfulness for Jesus' mercy and care on the leper's part as he knelt at Jesus' feet.

But this Scripture isn't just about this one particular leper – or even a group of lepers, for that matter. This Scripture applies equally to all of you as well – for like these lepers, each one of you also has some particular, acute need. And you know what that need is better than anyone else – whether it be a health need, financial, or whatever. And, in addition, there are also needs common to all – like food, drink, shelter, safety, companionship, compassion – and yes, forgiveness. So recognizing those needs – whatever they might be for you personally – you should watch closely and observe what happened to that leper who returned to give thanks.

There is a difference between what this leper experienced and what you experience. What I mean is, that while this leper had our Lord's voice spoken *directly* into his ears when Jesus said: "Go, show yourself to the priest," Jesus meets your needs *indirectly*. Or, putting it another way, Jesus meets your needs through *others*. He provides you with parents, employment, or other benefits in order to feed, clothe, and shelter you. He places other people in your life – and not just so that they can serve you,

but so that you, in return, might also serve them! He gives you His Sacraments and the preached Word of the Gospel to bestow eternal life and guard you against any doubts that your sins are truly forgiven before our Father in heaven. So then, while Jesus at one time acted *directly* to serve the leper in this text, He now works *indirectly* to serve you. Still, the action is the same. Your need is what prompts Jesus to act, which in turn leads to thankfulness on your part – whereupon, like the leper, you throw yourself at Jesus’ feet and thank Him.

But how can you even begin to measure all the things our Lord has done for you? How can you take stock, not only of those great gifts of life and salvation through His suffering, cross and resurrection, but also of the countless lesser gifts He so abundantly and patiently provides? I’d like to suggest that the Lord’s Prayer – that perfect prayer which our Lord Jesus Himself taught us to pray – might be a good starting point, because in it you have a summary of everything for which you ought to be thankful. There is no need which cannot be found in one of the petitions of this prayer. And, there is no need mentioned in this prayer which our Lord won’t meet – indeed, which He hasn’t already met in His suffering, death and resurrection!

Do you fear for employment or livelihood? – then pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Do you struggle with guilt from sins long past? – then pray: “Forgive us our trespasses.” Do you suffer weakness, doubt, or depression of any sort? – then pray: “Lead us not into temptation,” and: “Deliver us from evil.” But when you pray, pray with the understanding that your needs are what moves Jesus into action – which in turn leads to thankfulness on your part.

When you pray in the First Petition: “Hallowed be Thy Name,” thank God that His name *is* indeed holy, and that He *has* given His name to you in Baptism so that you might share in His holiness. When you pray: “Forgive us our trespasses,” thank God that your trespasses and sins *have* truly been forgiven – and that our Lord Jesus has become *the* Trespasser for us all, bearing the debt of your sin upon His cross. When you pray: “Give us this day our daily bread,” do so with the thankful realization that God *does* open His hands to satisfy the desires of every living thing.

*This*, dear Christian, *this* is how you ought to pray – not because you have to, but because you are able to. You pray your prayers of thanksgiving, not because you are a small child who still has to learn proper manners, but because you have been given new life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. You pray your thanks because this is what faith does – this is what faith is – this is what faith looks like. You pray because you know God has cured the leprosy of your sin, provided meat for your table and clothing for your body. You pray because you know a much greater home awaits you in heaven than the one in which you now live. You pray because your greatest need has led to Jesus’ action – and indeed, because of the promise of His Father and His great love for us fallen sinners, He has acted mightily for you – and always will act – for His name’s sake, and because of who He is – the only Savior of sinners – your Savior and mine. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.