

Why Thank We All Our God?

Luke 17:11-19

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

November 27, 2019 – Eve of Thanksgiving

† † † † † † †

In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the Gospel text just read, you heard the account of what happened when Jesus, heading toward Jerusalem as He passed through Samaria and Galilee, met ten lepers – outcasts, the refuse of society, men who, knowing no compassion from this world, stood afar off – not being able even to look up because of their guilt and shame – but yet, still lifting their voices boldly, crying out and saying: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Then Jesus, hearing their pleas, responded: “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. Of course, you are all familiar with the rest of the story, how although ten were cleansed, only one came back to give thanks. And that’s what most people take home from this account – namely that they ought to be more thankful for the good things that come their way.

Interestingly enough though, just prior to this reading, Jesus had spoken with His disciples about what it means to have faith – specifically, the faith of a mustard seed. Then He talked with them about servanthood, saying: “Which of you – having a servant plowing or tending sheep – will say to him when he comes in from the field: ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ Will he not rather say to him: ‘Prepare something for *my* supper. Then gird yourself and serve *me* until I’ve eaten and drunk, and afterward *you* can eat and drink?’ Does he thank that servant because he had done those things which were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are

commanded, say: ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have only done what it was our duty to do.’”

We have only done what it was our duty to do. So, what is *your* duty toward God? Luther summed it up this way in his explanation to the meaning of the First Article of the Creed. He wrote: “God richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil. And all this He does purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me – for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.” In other words, it’s as a result of God’s goodness, the fact that He defends us from danger, and that He guards and protects us from all evil – even, and perhaps especially, the evil of our own sin – that we are duty bound to thank and praise Him.

So, as we consider this account of the ten Lepers, I’d like to suggest to you that it would be a good thing if each of us were to leave here tonight with a renewed desire and conviction, “to thank and praise God.” But, that conviction *must not* come from the Law. You dare not read this Scripture as an admonition that you are to be like the one who returned to give thanks, and not like the nine who didn’t. In other words, there is more here in this text that ought to move you to thank and praise our Lord, other than the feeble example of that one humble soul who did precisely that. Let’s begin with Jesus’ statement to the lepers that they go and show themselves to the priest. Jesus did this, of course, because that

was the Jewish custom for lepers who had been cleansed of their disease. They were to first go to the priest so that the priest might then declare them to be “clean” once again.

This declaration of cleansing by the priest is what restored them to the community from which they had formerly been cast out – the implication being that in going they would be healed. What you need to see here is that in spite of the fact that a great many people believe the point of this text is that those who didn’t return were ungrateful – and that we therefore don’t want to be ungrateful like they were – I don’t think it would be prudent to assert that the nine who didn’t return to give thanks were necessarily unthankful or ungrateful. Frankly, after what they had been through, I’m not sure it would be possible *not* to be thankful. The real reason Jesus told this story is that only one of them recognized *Him* as the Source of their healing.

Now let’s place ourselves into this scene for a moment. Like lepers whose skin has been parted from their bones by the ravages of this terrible disease, you and I, as the Psalmist declares, have “our bones out of joint” due to the guilt of our sin. Apart from God’s grace and His forgiving mercy in Christ Jesus, we would be separated for eternity, not only from the rest of humankind, but more importantly, from God Himself. While the knowledge of our sin may drive us to hang our heads, it’s the grace of God that moves us to lift our voices and cry out: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” And as that plea rises from our feeble lips, God touches us with the very grace of His Son. He pours the water of Holy Baptism over our bodies to cleanse us from our sin. He plants His forgiv-

ing Word into our ears, and into our mouths He places His very body and blood given and shed for us sinners to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. And all this He does so that you and I might be declared clean and once again be able to lift up our heads – not in pride, but in confidence, knowing that He is the great Savior of our soul and the Redeemer of our life.

Truly, it is because this Jesus, who took upon Himself the guilt of your sin, rose as Victor over death and the grave, and works in your stead for your good, purely out of “divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you,” that you are duty bound to thank and praise Him as you receive and acknowledge Him as the Source of everything. Hence *your* thanks and praise come not out of a desire to appease Him, or as an attempt to entreat Him to be merciful to you, but in recognition of the fact that He has already been merciful to you in Christ – and that in Christ He will continue to shower you with His mercy and grace solely for the sake of Him who came into this world to be our Savior – because there was no other way any of us could have saved ourselves. Therefore we sing our praises and give our thanks to God today and every day, all for the sake of Him who came to save sinners, of whom we are all chief, even our Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him alone be all glory, honor and praise, who lives forever with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 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.