

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Thanksgiving Day
Luke 17:11-19
Nov. 28th, 2013

A blessed Thanksgiving Day to all of you. This day is an excellent day to remember our blessings given by God. What are some of your blessings? Name me a few right now....

All of these blessings we are thankful for. We give thanks for them... a thanksgiving. However, there were a few things that I didn't hear you mention. Perhaps you didn't mention them because they are not-so-good. Maybe you don't think of them as anything to "give thanks" for. Maybe because those other things has caused more problems, more worry and a "lack of" joy that there is no way we would call up to God and say, "thank you" for whatever it is that we are not so thankful for.

Would you ever be... could you ever be... have you ever been thankful for something we would label as bad, terrifying, terrible or hurtful? I mean, how many of us, me included, have been saying, "Thank you, Lord, for the terrible storms and loss of life in the Philippines these last couple of weeks?" How many of us have been saying, "Thank you, Lord for the terrible boss I have, the horrible relationship I have with that person in my family, or the medical problems I have?" None of us mentioned any of those things. My question is, can we and should we be thankful for those things as well?

Now I've given you something to think about. Ponder, first, if you will, the ten men with leprosy in the Gospel text for today. Who would want leprosy – especially in the day and age of Jesus? No one wanted you to be around. By law you were placed outside of the community and considered dead. I have mentioned before that for a person with leprosy in the middle-ages they would speak the burial rite for the dead on your behalf – because you were as good as dead. Leprosy was a terrible thing physically and socially.

As you know how bad it was to have leprosy, could those ten men be thankful for having such a terrible disease? Could they be thankful for having the disease – or – just be thankful that Jesus came along to heal the disease? Now I have you thinking even more, don't I?

What opportunity would they have had to receive the healing power of Jesus, if they didn't have leprosy? What opportunity to see the face of the Savior would they have had, if they didn't have leprosy? What opportunity to witness to others about what the Almighty had done for them, if they didn't have leprosy? Setting aside the words of the Samaritan who came back to "give thanks" – we know he was thankful. I'm simply asking, do these men have the opportunity to be thankful for what started it all – what was the beginning of what Jesus showed He could accomplish? I say, yes!

Have you ever seen a horrible thing turn about to be a true blessing for you or for someone else? At the time, you can't imagine it. At the time you are not thankful. But perhaps later, even if there are devastating results that come our way, you see what God has done. In what God has done, you give thanks.

I contend we do that each Good Friday – or any time, for that matter, we ponder the wounds of our Savior Jesus on the cross. What could there be for us to be thankful when our Lord and Savior is nailed to a cross and being ridiculed by the nations? Yet, we are thankful for Good Friday, because we know the whole story. We are thankful for the bleeding and the dying.

Could you imagine suffering that kind of pain and death and saying, “Thank you, God, for all of this?” Hardly.

However, with Thanksgiving on our mind today, we are thankful for the blessings we have. Those blessings do not come to us without warts. For tremendous blessing of healing, those ten men needed to be sick first. It’s hard to comprehend the “how” and “why” of our sufferings. It’s hard for us to say, “thank you, God, for this horrible pain.” But I want you to keep something in mind. God is the God of our good days and our bad. The Lord is the Lord over our times of health and our times of sickness. The Lord is in charge of all of our days and our nights no matter what the situation we find ourselves in.

It’s difficult to see God in the midst of suffering. And when we don’t see Him, we are more apt to believe that He isn’t around for it. And in those situations, we think, why call out to Him anything positive? We will shout because He is not there (so we think) or not taking care of us (so we think) or leaving us to be dealt with by Satan (so we think).

It’s not true. In all we endure, the Jesus on the cross is with us saying to you and to me, I know sufferings as well. In all we endure, we can give thanks because God is the author of the narrative. Blessings abound in ways we do not understand. The list we compiled at the beginning of this sermon, is a list we think of off the top of our head. They are meaningful things. But what about that which we aren’t calling to mind right now? What about that which seems like “not-so-much” of a blessing?

Beloved, call to mind today, if you have a chance with your family, maybe even if you have some time to ponder your Lord’s blessings alone, what the story behind the story of your blessings might be. Sometimes you will go back and remember how hard things were before you realized out of it all, there was this tremendous gift for which you are very thankful. Keep in mind that the story behind the story for the lepers was a horrible ostracizing disease that made them completely unclean and separate from the rest of society. Keep in mind there is story in that story for you, too. God makes the sick well. He takes those who are absolutely unworthy to be counted among the living and the clean and He makes them clean. You are one of the ten lepers. You are the one Jesus says, “*Go, show yourselves to the priests,*” while immediately being brought back to life. Thank you, Lord, for this truly remarkable and undeserved blessing. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.