

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Thanksgiving
Luke 17:11-19
November 26th, 2015

It's Thanksgiving Day and I forgot to wear my pilgrim costume. We didn't dress the acolyte up as a little Indian nor will we have a reenactment of the first thanksgiving with turkey and all the trimmings. It's funny how we think of thanksgiving. I remember those school plays with the kids – the stories we were told in school – the historically pleasant meeting of those who lived here in this place we now call the United States, and those who came over on the Mayflower. Thanksgiving is a time for family, for friends, and for food all coming together to remind us of the first Thanksgiving and to be thankful for such things.

But thankful for what exactly? Thankful to whom? It's interesting how we take these secular days such as this one and then give them a Christian twist... or are we? Thanksgiving has been celebrated as a federal holiday every year since 1863, when, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national day of "**Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens**", to be celebrated on the last Thursday in November. Thanksgiving was also celebrated nationally in 1789, after a proclamation by George Washington. So, we might say we take a secular holiday like this one and give a "Thanksgiving to God" twist – or – better put perhaps, we take a day of Thanksgiving to God for His marvelous gifts and realize that there really is no difference. Thanksgiving has always, and will always, originate with the Lord.

The Scriptures are filled with moments of thankfulness. The Lord delivers Noah and his family and they are filled with thanks. God delivers His people from the hand of their enemies and they are thankful – even though we would get the impression that that thankfulness was short-lived. In Job it says, "*The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.*" It's hard for angels to shout for joy without being thankful for whatever it is that causes joy. The same thing with Mary when she says, "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*" as she gives God props for making wonderful things happen for her and the world. Even St. Paul reminds us to "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus,*" in 1 Thess. 5:18. There is much to give thanks about.

And then here in the Gospel text for today as well – Luke 17. This has become one of the quintessential thanksgiving texts in all the Scriptures. Why? Because the thanksgiving in the text is unexpected from one healed leper and expected from the other nine. And what happens is the opposite. The nine don't give thanks (or so it would seem) and the one other does give thanks.

I have to admit, I've always had a bit of a problem with this text – especially one thing that Jesus says: "*Go and show yourselves to the priest.*" Jesus was sending the 10 to the temple, but one of them can't go to the temple. Why, because he was a foreigner. The word in Greek is *Allogenas*. This is the very term used in the temple inscription that forbade the entry of foreigners into the Jerusalem temple. So, why did Jesus send Him away? Maybe the better question is; why did this one return, give thanks, and worship?

You see, the one who could not go to the temple, went to the temple. The foreigner went to the temple in the flesh – He went to where God dwelled – He went to God in the flesh – He went to the New Temple – Jesus!

So maybe this “Thanksgiving text” is not so much about what the nine didn’t do as much as it is about what the one did do. It’s about Jesus being the place of worship for all people. It’s about thanksgiving to God for what He did and then worship to God for what He did. This is a worship Jesus text more than anything else. This text would have us remember that worship and thanksgiving go together.

Worship and thanksgiving is why we are here today. It’s a blessed day indeed. And though it is a “National Day of Thanksgiving” – a secular holiday – it doesn’t matter. This is the day we remember to be thankful for everything. We are thankful for our family, our places to live and worship, etc... We are thankful for what people have done for us. And though these are earthly blessings, they come from the Lord. When our neighbor helps us, comes along side of us in our times of need, it is our Lord who pours out this compassion from His Holy Will through the blessed instruments He put before us. When our Lord feeds us the faith, the truth, the everlasting hope in this blessed Word and Holy meal, He is coming to where we are, feeding our soul, cleansing us of our sins, and blessing our lives. God provides it all – the turkey the stuffing, the family, the oven, and the eternal blessings that go with everything.

Today we bow before the King with thanksgiving. We do so not begrudgingly, wondering why we are here to give thanks and others are not. Rather, we take our words and lives of thanksgiving and give it to the Lord – the Lord who pours these blessings to us each and every day.

So, instead of my pilgrim or Indian outfit, instead of a big turkey and meal that brought two groups of strangers together in a celebration we remember on this day. Perhaps we remember that, despite whatever difference we have as human beings in this world we live in, today we are gathered at a different kind of table. This table has more than the first Thanksgiving table and your table later today at home as well. This table has the Lord’s very body and blood given not to fill your stomach but to nourish your soul. This table will bring us together under the umbrella of a different kind of family – adopted sons and daughters through baptism of our Lord. Come let us remember. Come let us give thanks. But most importantly, come, let us feast at this Holy meal given to us this day. Amen.

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