

Text: Luke 17.11-19 (Ten Lepers)
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Grace and peace be to you FROM our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ-and thanks be to God FOR our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My memories of Thanksgiving celebrations have always included 4 F's" [congregational participation encouraged here]: fun, family, food, football. But for some reason, my memories as a child of Thanksgiving Eve services have always been 3 "S's": solemn, somber, sleepy.

Perhaps you don't share such recollections, but I decided that I'm going to try to make this sermon a joyous celebration of Thanksgiving. I say this by means of introduction, and something of an apology, to my light-hearted, yet hopefully still meaningful, Thanksgiving message. It's just that, well:

I don't want you to think I'm shallow and certainly not rude,
It's just that I am in a Happy T. Day mood.
And so with the help of God I'll be rhyming till the end,
But I'm going to count on you to say the final, Amen.

I start with the story of ten lepers which has always puzzled me.
So let me tell it once again and see if you agree.
It says, Jesus was going along, and minding his own business,
when he was met by ten men with leprosy, who carefully kept their distance.
(For leprosy, if you recall, was a terrible skin disease
which you wouldn't want to wish on your worstest enemies.)
These lepers were all shouting, "Master, Jesus!
Please have mercy and do your best to heal us!"
Now Jesus was the sort to be merciful and kind,
and he had healed many who were sick or deaf or blind.
But in this case, Jesus said that they should
go to the priest, the one who by law, would
check them out completely and then to let them know
whether the leprosy was healed and they were free to go.

I suspect they were a bit confused by Jesus' direction,
for he hadn't really healed them of their terrible infection.
But they must have all believed that Jesus had a plan
for they started off together to see the priestly man.
While going on the way is when the miracle came true
for suddenly their skin was clean and healthy through and through.
When one of them saw that his skin had been restored,
he came running back, praising the God whom he adored.
Then he threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him without end.
(And by the way you ought to know he was a Samaritan.
In those days, everyone thought Samaritans were a joke.
They looked down on them and despised those 'stupid' folk.)
Jesus said, "There should've been ten who were healed on the path

but only one's returned, so now let me do my math...
It means there's nine still left going on their way
who haven't bothered to return to me and say
their thanks to God, the source of all that's good,
except this one grateful guy from the Samaritan neighborhood."
To the former leper then he said, "Get up and go;
Your faith has made you well, you know."

Well, that's the story and now do you see
the part of it that kind of puzzles me?
I just know if I were one of those ten
I'd be among the nine who didn't return again.
For I am so concerned about trying to obey
that I'd do exactly what Jesus did in fact say.
By that I mean, he said to go to the priest
who'd tell me if my leprosy had ceased.
And so I'd go and even if I saw
my leprosy healed, well, Jesus was the Law,
and so with the eight other guys we'd see the priest
and when he'd say we were healed, well, then we'd throw a feast.
So, of course, I'd be thankful, but would it then be too late
to thank the person who had done for me something so great?

As I try to apply this story to the present time,
I am wondering--will I find enough words that rhyme?
But other than that it's still my concern
to see what we from this story can learn.

Okay, let's come at it in another way
by resetting the story in the modern day.

Let's say that ten kids are playing out in the yard
and thinking how nice it'd be to have an ice cream bar.
When along comes their mother, and they start to scream and shout
for that wonderful ice cream that they've been dreaming about.
Their mother loves them so she gives them each a dollar
and tells them, "Go to the store and buy that for which you hollar."
If those kids did exactly as she said and just went to the store
and not one of them thanked her, well, that'd be pretty poor.

From telling myself this little story, I got a new insight,
and maybe you thought of it too, so tell me if I'm right.
In order to be thankful, must we be reminded, "What do you say?",
every time God gives us those things for which we pray?
The point is: we shouldn't have to be told to say, "Thank you!"
The best thanks come naturally, don't you think that's true?
I mean, thanks should be an echo when we're given something great
Thanks should be the shadow which from the gift you cannot separate.
Thanks should grow like flowers when showered from above.
Thanks should flow like kisses which follow upon love.

Yet how many of you parents remind your child, "What do you say?"
and keep on reminding your kids a hundred times a day?
But I won't pick on you kids, for we grownups forget too,
and perhaps in even more important matters fail to say Thank you.

Now I'm not going to scold us all on this Thanksgiving Eve,
[But I'm not going to scold us all on this Thanksgiving Day,]
for there's another thing in this story that I've just perceived.
[for there's another thing in this story that I'd like now to relay.]
Did you notice? To those ten lepers, Jesus never said,
"What do you say?" when off on their way they led.
So if our God is not the sort to ask, "What do you say?"
Then I'm not going to do it and get in the Lord God's way.
God must just figure that each of us is wise enough to know
that to give God thanks is the proper way to go.

And having said this, methinks I'm getting wiser all the time,
for another big thought just popped into my mind.
For so many things we fail to stop and thank our God,
yet God keeps giving us stuff. Now that's a little odd,
and I guess the only way to explain it, though I cannot understand,
is that God loves us so much that he keeps holding out his hand
and showering us with gifts and blessing each and every day,
for God is the source of all the goodness that ever comes our way.

Now here's another new thought. I offer it as an aside,
I don't know why I didn't think it before, it's too incredible to hide.
What if we had to ask God for every little thing we need.
That'd be an awesome job, an impossible task, indeed.
What is everything we need, where would you even start?
Quick, better ask for air and earth---ooo, don't forget your heart
and your brain and nose and skin and toes
and all those parts only a doctor knows.
But even with a body, we've only just begun
to count the countless things a body needs to run.
No, we can't begin to count all the ways that God has blessed us.
But wait, there's more! The greatest gift is our Lord and Savior, Jesus.
For while God deserves our thanks for supporting the human race,
eternal life deserves eternal thanks for God's gift of loving grace.

(It's getting tougher to keep on rhyming, and though it has been fun,
another thing we all can be thankful for is that I'm almost done!)

Now if this story were a parable, I think we would admit
That it has parabolic elements that make it kind of fit.
Ten Lepers would perhaps be a common enough sight,

But *one* was a Samaritan!? That doesn't seem quite right.
Jews and Samaritans together? How could that be?
Unless it truly is the case that misery loves company!
So when Jesus sent them to the Jewish priest, what did that Samaritan think?
"Well, this guy may be a healer, but I think he needs a shrink."
Still, the Samaritan went, yet he came back again too:
A recovered leper who now imagined life from a whole new point of view.
And us? If we think we're something special, do we play a social game?
But if we count ourselves among the lost, do we see we're all the same?
For while we are a gathering of saints; we're recovered sinners too.
Our past has been forgiven—not forgotten—so what's a sinner/saint to do?
Can you even call it a choice to do anything other than say, "God, thank you!"

So on this [Thanksgiving Eve / Day / Sunday] I won't be scolding, "What do you say?"
And I will not try to enumerate the innumerable ways
that God has blessed us beyond anyone's possible measure.
And I will only remind us of the very greatest treasure
that God has given us in sending us the Son
to bring eternal life to each and every one.
What else is there to rhyme?
Then I guess that it is time
to thank the Lord and sing God's praise,
Offer ourselves back to God all our days.
Yes, thanks be to God, it shall be so
and let us let the whole wide world know.

I've one more word to rhyme seeing how I've reached the end,
So I ask you now, let all God's people say: AMEN!