

Sermon for Thanksgiving Day Eve

Date: November 21, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Epistle Reading: Philippians 4:6-20

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19



Sermon Text: Luke 17:11-19

Sermon Title: What Kind of Leper Are You?

Introit: Psalm 104:24, 27-28; Antiphon: Psalm 104:33

Hymns:

LSB 895 – Now Thank We All Our God

LSB 789 – Praise and Thanksgiving

LSB 892 – Come Ye thankful People Come

LSB 790 – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Distribution:

LSB 628 – Your Table I Approach

LSB 617 – O Lord, We Praise Thee

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Special



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Text: Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee on his way to Jerusalem. ¹² As he went into a village, ten men with a skin disease met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and shouted, “Jesus, Teacher, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he told them, “Show yourselves to the priests.” As they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ When one of them saw that he was healed, he turned back and praised God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He quickly bowed at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. (The man was a Samaritan.) ¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Weren’t ten men made clean? Where are the other nine?” ¹⁸ Only this foreigner came back to praise God.” ¹⁹ Jesus told the man, “Get up, and go home! Your faith has made you well.”

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May God's grace, peace, and mercy be given to you always in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day! We will eat too much. Watch too much TV. (Most likely some football.) We will sleep too much. (Most likely during the football game.) We will be thankful! Which is what we should be on Thanksgiving Day.

We have a lot for which to be thankful, and on this day we, as a nation, have set aside a day to express thankfulness, gratitude, and appreciation to God, family, and friends for all those blessing in material things, relationships, and most importantly our salvation given to us by God. We have a lot for which to be thankful, but are we always as thankful as we should be?

I suppose many of you have bird feeders outside of your home. I admit that mine tend to run dry during the Summer months, but with the onset of current weather events I fill them more often. The little birds took no time in finding the bountiful bouquet of bird seed I brought to feed them. They are popping in all day long to eat their fill. Throughout the colder months I will try to ensure that they have plenty to eat.

I'm sure many of you will do the same. Here's a question for you: How many birds have ever thanked you? The truth is most of the time when I happen to walk outside, the birds will chirp in annoyance, peep in indignation, or whistle a warning, and all those little feathered friends will flutter off into the trees to squawk and squeak at me in anger and frustration because I have interrupted their meal. You know the one I paid for!

Never once has one of those little buggers knocked on my door just to say, "thanks for the vittles pastor." Never once have any of them thought to write me a little sing-songy tune in gratitude for all that I have given them, all that I have done to help them get through the Winter. The most they have ever done is cower in the trees making it very clear I am an unwelcome visitor to their table. You know the one I put out there for them! They are particularly put-out when I walk up to the feeder to fill it. So much for examples from nature on Thanksgiving Day.

Then again... Maybe those little ungrateful tweeterers are just the example we need. Think back to the Garden of Eden. God had given us everything we needed, provided for everything we wanted. There was only one rule. Don't eat from the tree. What do we do? We ungratefully get annoyed with God for holding out on us and eat from the tree, thinking we'll get more than He was willing to let us have. So much for gratitude.

Now I don't know about you, but I put out a pretty good spread for those birds. Many different kinds of seeds in different kinds of feeders. I want to be sure everyone gets their fill. I even slave over a hot stove making homemade suet. (Okay the "slaving over a stove" bit might be a slight exaggeration, but it is homemade.) *[You can find my recipe at the end of this sermon.]* Yet not once do I get a thank you.

Are we so different from those birds? Look at how we live, and what we have, compared to the rest of the world. Look at the wealth, comfort, riches, and luxuries we have compared to everyone else. Perhaps we should all be a little more thankful. The problem is we get accustomed to our comforts. We get used to our stuff. Then we forget how we got that stuff; who gave us the ability to have that stuff. We start to forget to say thanks.

In our Gospel reading today Jesus is walking the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee. Now you need to understand no self-respecting Jew would be caught dead in Samaria. They would walk for miles, around the region of Samaria, rather than take the much shorter trip through it. The Samaritans were considered to be no better than animals. They were half-breeds; illegitimate descendants of God's chosen people. They were just about the worst thing a good Temple attending Jewish person could think of. (Well besides the Romans.)

As Jesus is walking along this borderland road with a crowd in tow, He encounters ten men who have leprosy. Now there is one thing even worse than a Roman soldier. That would be a Samaritan with Leprosy. The law forbid them from getting too close to anyone. They had to walk down the road calling out, "Leper! I'm a leper! Stay back! Stay away!" When these ten men see Jesus, they keep their distance but they shout something else. It is obvious that Jesus reputation for healing people has become well known everywhere by this time. These ten men shout, "Jesus, Teacher, have mercy on us!"¹

Jesus does something strange. A good Jewish rabbi would have told them to get away, get lost, get gone. Jesus however was not just a good Jewish rabbi, though even for Him this was different. He just shouted back to them, "Go show yourself to the priests."² He didn't approach them, or touch them. He just spoke to them. Jesus came to them the way God usually comes to us, through His Word, and His Word has power and authority.

The lepers obey without question. You see the priests had declared them unclean. Now at Jesus command they must return to the priests to be declared clean again. As they walk something happened. Now we don't know how it happened. We don't know if they noticed it on each other, or realized something was changing on themselves, but something did happen. The Leprosy was fading, disappearing, vanishing. They were clean!

They all began to scamper away to the priests who would declare them clean and allow them to return home. To hug their children again, to kiss their wife again, to be able to protect and provide for their family again. You can be sure their pace got a little faster. Then one of them stopped. We don't know if the others just didn't notice, or perhaps didn't care. He was a Samaritan after all, it not like he was worth anything, but he did stop. He stopped and turned around. He ran back to Jesus and worshiped Him, giving gratitude, and thanksgiving, for the wonderful, miraculous, gift that he had been given.

All those good Jewish people, some of them perhaps walking with Jesus because it made for a good photo-op. Then this Samaritan gets in the way. Looking down their nose they might think to themselves, "You got healed, now get where you belong, on the other side of the road."

Then Jesus asks, "Where are the other nine?"³ I bet that question put a damper on the conversations in the crowd. I bet the gratitude of the Samaritan, and the ingratitude of those other nine, stood out in stark contrast. I bet a few of them learned a lesson about loving your neighbor as yourself that day.

1 Luke 17:13
2 Luke 17:14
3 Luke 17:17

That is a lesson we could all learn from time to time. We forget how much we have, and start thinking we don't have enough. We might even start thinking we deserve more. That's how my birds act, and probably yours too. When you watch those birds they just might teach you something. Something a Samaritan taught a smug crowd following Jesus one day. That becomes especially true when we think about all that God has done for us. In spite of our ingratitude, and our unthankfulness, He sent his Son to die for us, so that we could live.

...

The story is told of a king.⁴ King Alphonso of Spain, around the year 1000AD. The Muslims were coming out of Africa, and the Middle East, and attacking parts of Europe. Spain was now in their sights. They had surrounded the capital city but had been unable to capture it. King Alphonso defended the city and his people brilliantly. It looked like the battle was nearly won for Spain. The city could not be taken.

One of King Alphonso's sons felt a bit too safe and ventured just outside of the city walls one evening. "They would not dare come into range of our archers," he thought to himself. While he was walking along, suddenly, without notice, men captured him, but they did not kill him. They brought him to the sultan who saw in this young man an opportunity to take the city.

The sultan commanded a gallows be built in plain view of the castle. He also commanded a message be written in Spanish on a large sign. As the Sun dawned on the Spanish landscape that morning the people, the guards on the wall, and the king, awoke to a horrible sight. As they looked out over the enemy army, they saw a gallows, and a sign which read:

ALPHONSO, YOUR CITY OR YOUR SON.

The people looked on in horror knowing that their lives were ended. The army would pour in through the gates and all of them would be killed or enslaved. The military on the walls of the city knew that the battle could no longer be won. They could not defend the city, or its people, once the gates were opened. The advisers looked to the king in silence. Who could question the king's intent or actions. Who could ask him to... to do what could not be done.

The city waited for the king's command, but they did not have to wait long. The king called a runner and gave the runner a message. He told the runner to deliver the message to the sultan personally. The message read:

Let my son die,
that my people may live.

Before that day there were probably ungrateful people in that city. People who disagreed with the way the king was running the war, or handling the city's resources. There were probably people criticizing the king, and complaining about what he was doing. You know what? Knowing what we know about people, there were probably people who were still ungrateful after that day, though they probably looked very foolish if they shared their ingratitude with most folks.

⁴ Though I have heard this story a few times, I have never been able to determine for certain if it is a true record.

Take a look at the world around you. With the Christmas season arriving you will see the History Channel®, the Discovery Channel®, and other channels running their own version of Christmas specials that will explain that the Bible is wrong, and they will then proceed to show you what they have decided “really happened.” They will demean and belittle the Christian faith and the Church, though they will be very polite about it. When you think about what God has done for them, and us, in giving His only Son to death, so that we could live... How sad.

Don't be like the world. Don't be like the Temple authority when Jesus walked this Earth. Don't be like the nine lepers. Be like that, so called, worthless Samaritan. The one who received the praise of Jesus, the Holy Christ of God. Be thankful. Be grateful. Be filled with praise for God who has blessed us richly. He has given us something we could never deserve or earn. Eternal life. On Thanksgiving Day tomorrow pause at some time and remember to say a prayer, just to say thanks to God for everything.

Amen.

My own Bird Suet Cake Recipe

2 cups lard
2 cups chunky peanut butter
1 cup rolled oats
1 cup yellow cornmeal
1 cup mixed wild bird seed
1 cup sunflower seeds

1. Melt lard and peanut butter in pot.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients and blend well.
3. Pour into paper-lined forms.(ie:muffin tins, Tupperware® sandwich boxes,etc)
4. Put in freezer, and keep frozen until used.

