

Sermon for Thanksgiving Day Eve

Date: November 27, 2019

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: A life of thankfulness as an observable witness of a grace-filled life.

Introit: Psalm 104:24, 27–28, 30, 33

Hymns:

LSB 892 – Come, Ye Thankful People, Come

LSB 785 – We Praise You, O God

LSB 781 – We Give Thee But Thine Own (v. 1-2)

LSB 809 – Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Distribution:

LSB 893 – Sing to the Lord of Harvest

LSB 895 – Now Thank We All Our God

LSB 894 – For the Fruits of His Creation

Liturgy: Divine Service: Creative Worship



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Text:

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Once upon a time, there was a king who went hunting game with his friend. As the king shot the arrow, his thumb came off. His friend said, "Praise God because He's in control." The king was furious and threw his friend in prison. Sometime later, the king was hunting when he ventured into a distant land where he'd never been before. Suddenly he was surrounded by cannibals. They tied him up and were ready to cook him when they saw the hand with no thumb. "No perfect, no cookie," said the chief, and they let him go. He went back to his friend and apologized. "You were right. Not having a thumb saved my life." His friend said, "Praise God that I have been in prison for so long." "How can you praise God?" the king asked. His friend replied, "If I hadn't been in prison, I would have been hunting with you. And look: two thumbs." (Source: Llewellyn, Tony. Hot Sermon Illustrations. Aussie Worship.)

Frequently, we fail to recognize how blessed we are when we focus too much on the things we miss in life, get into unreasonable or inappropriate expectations rather than on what we already have. For these two men to enjoy the present, they had to experience life from a much different setting. I hope we don't need to go to that extent for ourselves to appreciate whatever we have right now in our life.

When we return to today's text, we also learn that gratitude is an essential and readily observable feature of a grace-filled life. From the story of the thankful Leper, we notice how grace and gratitude are linked, in making us joyful and praising people. When we experience the grace that frees us from all forms of self-centeredness, and bondage that inhabit grateful life, we become thankful people who joyfully praise the Lord.

Are you a grateful person? I'm sure you would say yes. But this evening, as we are getting ready for the big day of Thanksgiving, I want us thoroughly reflect on our own life of thankfulness. An unreflecting life and feeling of entitlement are dangerous and often leads to ungratefulness. If we also tend to be calculating and overwhelmed with junks of this world (Romans 8:6-16), we hardly able to be thankful.

The difference between the grateful leper and the nine others lies between unreflective life and entitlement. It was only the Samaritan Leper, who came back and prostrated himself at the Lord's feet, in recognition of undeserved blessing, as an unloved outsider (the Samaritan disdained by Jews as mixed-race of Jewish and gentile Assyrian settlers). You're probably wondering why. Jesus himself asked, "Where are the other nine?" Indeed, the matter was the issue of true faith, that recognized undeserved grace, hence joyfully returned to praise and worship Jesus. The faith of this poor Leper portrays a genuine faith that is capable of expressing

gratitude as a response to grace experienced. The other nine, where unreflective, or callouses, or didn't want to magnify Jesus as their benefactor out of pride.

The Samaritan's thanksgiving and prostration at Jesus' feet is an indication of his acknowledgment that God is at work when Jesus speaks to hurts and brokenness of our spirit, and he makes us whole. A response of such faith is always joyful worship and life of grace-filled living.

It is only this kind of grace-filled life that increases our happiness (Philippians 4:4) by shaping our attitude, improve our witness of Christ (1 Peter 2:12, "Live such good lives among the pagans that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us") solidify our relationship with God (Hebrews 12:25 "Let us please God by serving him with thankful hearts.")

We have so many reasons to be thankful. God has blessed each one of us through Christ and continually nourishing us through His Word and Sacraments. Like those lepers, who were made to heal through faith, out of God's plan in Christ, we are all offered free salvation, changed status from alienation, and a possibility to be built into a new community of loving, caring, and supportive relationship. Look around, He has enriched our lives in many ways, through our fellowship, family, and friends, even in the midst of some of our scarcities and sufferings. There is a lot to thank for in our life. There is a lot to thank for this fellowship.

Each moment we experience is a gift of God. For instance, today is the one gift we have we been given, and the same is true with this coming new year and all its days. There is nothing we have done to deserve it. The only appropriate response is gratefulness. The Psalmist says, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139: 16). We live in divinely ordained moments, which God graciously creates, nurtures, and cares for.

Being gratefulness to God by itself is also the source and the condition in which life could be enjoyed. Paul in most of his letters, connects the importance of thankfulness and peace, and encourages us to make it our daily lifestyle, even in the mildest of suffering (1Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16; 1 These. 1:2-3, Col. 3:5). He encourages us to be thankful kind of people, because of the grace of God that was given us in Christ Jesus. Because of Christ, we are freed from all kinds of tiring self-righteousness and expectations, forgiven, renewed and are adopted to a big family, taking joy in serving each other and our neighbors. The gifts of new life and the promise we have in Christ is the real source of our peace and gratitude, which enables us to endure all life's problem through the Holy Spirit, in life and death our comforter.

We can't avoid suffering; all those events in our life that make our earthly life hard. Because we live in a sinful and decaying world; however, there is always something to be grateful for, on which we should focus, especially life in Christ. If you want to be happy, be a person of gratitude by focusing on what you have in Christ. By the way there is also enough scientific evidence that those people practice gratitude as a lifestyle, are emotionally healthy people, experience more good feelings, more relaxed, more resilient, less envious, and have happier memories. No wonder why God sternly warned the Israelite to always remember the gracious guidance of their Lord (Deut. 8:1-10). Ungrateful attitude is sin and leads not only to unhappiness, but also destroys life and its relationship.

Hence, let us focus on those blessings in our life as we get-together this coming Thanksgiving Day with family and friends, and enrich each other with gratitude and love, so that God may be glorified. That does not mean we should be blind to the tough stuff or the mess we had these past years in our life, but instead intentionally protect ourselves from losing sight of the good in our life because of Christ's blessings; enjoy and make the most out of the present and the future.

As I conclude, I would like to propose to your two questions to ponder about as you celebrate this thanksgiving and being also prepared to transition into the new year:

For what are you most thankful this year? List three major ones, and thank God for them.

What Kind of glory do you want to bring to God this coming year? List one or two and pray about it

May God help us to be steadfast in the true faith and fix our heart on what we already have in Christ and continue to lead a grace-filled life that is a blessing to our neighbors, so that God may be glorified. Amen.