

(But Wait! There is More!" (Luke 17:11-19)

October 13, 2019

Thanksgiving Sunday

I. Two Gifts

Nine men are running. It's unbelievable, what's just happened. A few minutes ago, they were lepers. They've had a horrible disease that was remorselessly killing them. Bad enough, but there's more: Leprosy is terrifyingly contagious and meant exile. Because of the disease, these men have been evicted from life. They've been forced to say goodbye to wives and children, house and home, friends and livelihood. For the rest of their lives, they are to live in isolation, where nobody else wants to; and if anyone comes within shouting distance, they are to warn them to stay away. This is living worse than death.

But no more! Nine men are running, and they're running home!

Just a few minutes ago, on that shunned and lonely border between Galilee and Samaria, the Man came -- the One known so well that even they had heard about Him. The Word has spread. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ten men cried. They had nothing else to trust in. Their lives were gone, their bodies failing. They have no other hope; that's the sort of people who are ready to hear of a Savior.

Then Jesus spoke the words: "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Strange words of hope, for the only time a leper would do so would be if he was cured. Ten lepers hear these words, and they start out to find the priests. As they go, they are cleansed. Their sickness is gone, because Jesus has healed them. He has taken their infirmity into Himself, and He will bear it to the cross for destruction.

This gift of healing is astounding. They have their lives back. They're going to go hug wives and kids for the first time in who knows how long. They can chat with friends in the market square. They can be around people again. All because Jesus spoke the Word. Instantly, ten men were healed. They have their lives back. They start the race to see the priests.

Of the ten, one returns, falls on his face at Jesus' feet, and glorifies God.

The other nine aren't looking back. They're going home. They're not going to let anything stop them, because they have their life back and so much lost time to make up. They've really messed up, these nine men; but not, perhaps, for the reason that you think. It's true: They're thankless, but failing to say thank you isn't their big mistake. The big mistake is this: They ran away before Jesus was done giving, and He had so much more to give them.

The other nine have what they most wanted (though not what they most need), and so they're on their way. Jesus wasn't done with them yet, but they've run back to life-as-it-was without a word of thanks.

But note here what the Savior doesn't do, for this is so very important. He doesn't give the thankless nine leprosy again; He doesn't retract the miracle because they're self-centered and unappreciative. He hasn't given them healing because of who they are; He's given it to them because of who He is. Whether or not they give thanks, He's given them a free gift and He will not take it back. He's given them back life and family and home; what's

tragic is that He had so much more to give that they don't want.

This is an important point: The Savior gives whether or not you say thank you.

Now, look at the conversation between the one Samaritan and the Lord. The Samaritan glorifies God and falls at Jesus' feet to worship; in other words, he's made the connection that Jesus is no less than God. The Word of healing has done more than restore his body and life; it has also caused faith within him. He knows that he stands before the Son of God; so he falls at His feet, glorifies Him and places his trust in Him.

Jesus confirms this with the words, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the other nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

Then He speaks the key words to this text, and this is a place where our English translation fails us, as it records our Lord saying, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well." But this is a terrible translation that robs us of joy. What Jesus really said was not "Your faith has made you well;" He said, "Your faith has saved you."

Jesus comes with two gifts for the lepers that day: Physical healing and saving grace. By His Word, He gives both gifts: He gives the lesser (!) gift of physical healing- which is huge in the context of this world, but tiny compared to eternal life. The lepers' faith doesn't make them physically well; otherwise, the nine wouldn't have been healed. By that same Word, He also gives them the gift of faith; and with faith, He is also giving them forgiveness and salvation. By His Word, He gives them both gifts!

Nine only want one of the two. Delighted and distracted with the gift of physical healing, they're on their way to make the most of the things of this world. Focused so much on this life alone, they throw away the faith (and salvation) and thanklessly run from the Savior.

The one, however, believes. He doesn't throw away the faith Jesus has given in favor of worldly things only. Believing, he has both gifts-physical healing and eternal salvation. He trusts that Jesus is the Son of God, his Savior. And, by that faith, he returns to give thanks.

Nine men are running, rejoicing in their good fortune. Sadly, they've left the greater treasure behind. The one Samaritan, though, has both; by faith, He has received both treasures that Jesus sought to give that day.

And once again, we note the generosity of Jesus: He does not take back the miracle of healing that He has given, despite the ingratitude of the nine. Instead, He lets them keep it, even as He still desires to give them the greater gift; and so in the hope that they might have salvation, He will go to the cross and die for the nine. He will die for the world. Whether the world thanks Him or not.

II. The Lord's Gracious Giving Today

This Gospel lesson is the standard Gospel lesson for Thanksgiving every year; and it certainly serves to remind us that we human beings are very poor at gratitude. However, while the sin of thanklessness and the importance of thanksgiving are two lessons from this text, I propose to you that this text is far more about the Lord's generosity to us.

The Lord still watches over this world, desiring to give His good gifts to all people. All of His good gifts: provision for this world and saving grace. The Lord does give all that we need for this life in this world. You know the list from the Small Catechism:

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil ..."

We have what we need for this day because God gives it to us for this day. Food grows because the Lord wills to grow food. Homes stay up and goods remain intact because the Lord preserves them. Baby teeth drop out and adult teeth grow in because of the Lord's intimate care for His creation. There will be a tomorrow because God will create tomorrow, if He wills.

Why does the Lord do these things? -because of our obedience? -because of our gratitude? No. He gives these gifts to everyone, whether they believe in Him or not. He gives these gifts to everyone, even when they give thanks to other gods for His gracious gifts. The Muslim and Buddhist do not have food because Allah and Buddha provide; they have food because, despite their unbelief, the one true God still provides for them. He gives all this not because of who **we** are, but because of who **He** is.

That's why the Catechism goes on to say:

"[He does] all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me, for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

Just as remarkable is this certain truth: Even if you do not thank and praise, serve and obey Him today, He will still give you what you need for this life tomorrow. Sadly, this news of God's generosity moves the sinner to say, "Great! If God gives me all this regardless, then I don't have to thank Him at all." But such thanklessness is dangerous indeed: Like the nine lepers, it leads the sinner to run away from God before He's done giving.

Because wait: There's more. The Lord does not stop with His gracious giving there. He does not want to provide only for this life, then leave us condemned for eternity; so He does all that is needed to give us eternal life. It is He who sends His Son to the cross. Jesus has not died there to make sure we have breakfast, lunch and dinner-God already provides that. He has died to redeem the world from sin, and God wills that all would be saved for Jesus' sake. Therefore, by His Word, He proclaims salvation for all. By His Word, He gives faith and forgiveness to all who hear. By the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, as we joyfully witnessed this morning, He showers forgiveness on even the tiniest infant. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. By His Holy Supper, He gives His body and blood-in, with and under the bread and wine-for the forgiveness of sins, to strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith unto life everlasting. These gifts are given just as freely as the things we need for this world.

So, our Lord remains the same as He did that day with the ten lepers. He comes ready to give to all people all that they need for this life, and all that they need for eternity. Both are freely offered, because of His faithfulness to us.

But here is the great curse of sin: Like the nine lepers, most will seize God's gifts of this life and run away without the saving grace. They may mouth words of thanks to a God whom they really don't

acknowledge; they may figure that food and clothing are commonplace enough that they are no great gift at all. And, as we've mentioned before, they may go a step deeper into darkness and give thanks to false gods and idols for what the Lord has done. Rather than acknowledge the Creator and Preserver, they may instead preach that the universe exploded into order and evolved into life. And as for the greater gifts of life and salvation, they deny these outright. Instead, death is glorified as a natural part of life, rather than the wages of sin.

It is the way of the world: God gives food to all, and very few are foolish enough to refuse the gift. God gives the greater treasure of heaven, and most run away.

And the Lord keeps on giving what they need, because of who He is. He preserves their lives and endures their unbelief, in the hope that they might turn and receive His better gifts of faith and salvation. For this we give thanks to the Lord.

We, dear Christians, are like the tenth leper-no thanks to us. Like that Samaritan, we come before the Lord with nothing, destined for only death and condemnation because of our sin. But the Lord gives. He gives all that we need for this body and life, and for this we give thanks. But wait, there's more: He gives even greater gifts. He gives you mercy, counting your sins against His Son instead of you. He gives you grace, counting Jesus' sin-less-ness for your sake and forgiving you. He pours these out freely by His means of grace; and with these gifts He gives you eternal life. For this, too, we give thanks to the Lord.

At least, we ought to. You see, for all of His giving, the Lord receives very little thanks: None from the unbeliever, little from the believer.

But here's the thing: He keeps on giving. Not because of who we are and what we do, for then we should expect very little indeed. No, He gives because of who He is, what He has promised, and what He has done for your salvation-the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, for your sins. He keeps on giving, for it is His nature faithfully to serve you.

In other words: Did you fail to thank Him for food and clothing, house and home today? He still gives them to you anyway. Have you failed to thank Him for faith and forgiveness, life and salvation? He still gives you forgiveness, dear Christians, even for these sins. It is easy for us to listen to the Old Adam, and to forget about thanking Him since He gives anyway; but that thanklessness is a sin that will work to destroy your faith. No, the truth that God continues to provide is not reason to stop our thankfulness; rather, it is reason to thank Him all the more!

So we give thanks unto the Lord this Thanksgiving Day, for He gives us all that we need. It depends on Him, not you-another cause for thankfulness. He gives all that you need for this life, it's true. But wait: There's more. So that you might have eternal life as well, He declares to you that you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.