Luke 17:11-19
Thanksgiving, Nov. 26, 2026
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On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. [12] And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance [13] and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." [14] When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. [15] Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; [16] and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. [17] Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? [18] Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" [19] And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Thankfulness, the *idea* of giving thanks, it's often tied to stuff. We ask our kids what they are thankful for, they list stuff. We make thankfulness chains and thankfulness trees, and we go around the table and take turns sharing what we're thankful for, it's all just *stuff.* Maybe not always *things*—many times it's people, sometimes it's good health, or a church family—but all of it is really just *stuff.* Our thankfulness always has an *object* on which it is resting.

This is why our thankfulness ebbs and flows, because those objects are sometimes taken away. I think this is also the reason why it is so difficult for us to imagine being thankful ***"in whatever situation,"*** as the Apostle Paul describes. (cf. Philippians 4:11) How can we be thankful if there is no *stuff* on which our thankfulness can rest?

True thankfulness is not based on stuff, it's based on our Savior. True thankfulness rests on Jesus as the foundation, and it flows from a heart of faith that is set on Jesus. True thankfulness *could* be *forgetful* of the stuff, but it can never be forgetful of Jesus. And I believe that's what we see in this text.

Our text today tells us two stories—a very, very sad story and a very, very happy story. This text tells us the very sad story of people who had their prayers answered—the sad story of nine people who received *exactly what they wanted* from Jesus. Which obviously doesn't sound very sad at all, until you compare it with the very happy story of the one man who wanted *Jesus* even more than he wanted what Jesus had given him, and in the end he received even more than he asked for.

There were ten men healed of leprosy that day. And there was one out of those ten who was also cured of blindness. One man who walked away that day able to see things clearly. That's the point of the story, isn't it? Isn't that the turning point of this account? Not when the man was *healed*, but when the man could finally *see* something. He could see himself, and he could see Jesus. He could see what he *needed*. And even at the risk of disobeying Jesus the Master himself, what he needed *most of all* was to be with Jesus. At that moment, *nothing* was more important.

All the hopes and dreams that he'd been hiding away in his heart—what he would be able to do when a priest *finally* declared him clean; where he would go the moment his exile ended; all the people he longed to see, reunions with his friends, with his children, his wife—all that could *wait*. All that could come later. What he *needed* right now was to be with Jesus.

As for the other nine men—hey, they were no longer lepers! They got *exactly* what they asked for! But they were still blind. They received this great gift from God, and they went *away* from God, content to have *just* the gift.

Is that what we are like, too? No longer lepers, but still blind? Do we desire the gifts more than we desire the Giver? Do we crave Jesus' presents for our lives, but think very little of His presence *in* our lives? Are we more like the nine, or are we more like the one?

Now, I know that I'm speaking to people who are in the house of God. I know that I am speaking to people who have gathered together on a Thursday morning because of a deep sense of gratitude to the God who both created and preserves them. I know that here today we are doing exactly what that *one* did, returning to the Source to give our thanks. But I also know myself. And I speak from experience.

Here in this house, we gather together and confess our sins before the Lord, and forgiveness is worded out in response, forgiveness which God declares is valid and *certain* as if Christ our dear Lord were dealing with us Himself. Here at this altar, we get to hold Christ's very body and blood. We receive it, it passes through our lips and becomes part of us. Here in this place, the Holy Spirit of God hastens to stir our hearts as the Word of life is proclaimed so that the life that Word *promises* is also *what* we receive. Here in this room, Christ's eternal blessing is pronounced upon each one of us so that every time we exit these doors, we depart with *God's* peace.

And when we leave this place where God has deigned to dwell among us and when we carry His blessing with us back to our homes, what typically occupies our thoughts *then*? What do we think about after we depart this place where God has come to bless us so richly? Don't our thoughts usually turn to something like this: "How in the world am I going to make it through this semester?" "Where will we find the money to pay for that?" "Will my loneliness never end?" "Why doesn't God ever answer my prayers?"

Here's our problem. The gifts that God gives to us are so fulfilling and joyful and satisfying, that we tend to lose sight of the Giver in favor of the gifts. Here we are gathered together in the Lord's presence where He declares us to be righteous, and what we would *prefer* is that the Lord would just give us whatever minor presents we have determined to be *right* for us. We're just like the nine, aren't we? We set our sights so *low*, and we often go away content with just the gifts (or *un*contented because we haven't yet *gotten* the gifts that we would *prefer*).

Now, I am *sure* that all ten of those men were exceedingly thankful that day when their lives were totally turned around. All ten of those men, even the nine, were *undoubtedly* content. They had received, after all, exactly what they asked for. They asked for mercy, they received great mercy. And I imagine that it was a *long* time before any one of them started complaining about their circumstances ever again. And yet their thankfulness was *not* equal; it was not the same. And that's because *true* thankfulness is not something that just *anyone* can possess. *True* thankfulness flows from faith in Christ, flows from hearts that are directed *to* Christ. And that's what we see here with the *one*.

Notice how Jesus performed this healing. He did not heal them immediately with just a Word. He could have done so, He'd done that sort of thing before—He did not do so here. He did not reach out and *touch* them and heal them. He could have done so, He'd done that sort of thing before—He did not do so here. Instead, Jesus sent these ten men on their way unhealed. Bodies still decaying, they started their journey to the temple still looking like the living dead, no measure of healing to hold on to. Instead, they had Jesus' Word to hold on to.

And how far along the road they were when the healing took place, if it was progressive or instantaneous—we don't know. But when the one saw what had happened, while holding on to only the Word of the Master, his eyes were opened. And by faith, he left his newfound freedom behind and returned to Jesus, because he could finally see clearly. He knew what this meant. What it meant, *most of all*, was that he needed *Jesus.*

Ten men came into contact with Jesus, the Master. Nine have left Him behind, never to be seen or heard from again. One comes back. Only one. The alien. The foreigner. This Samaritan.

Luke does not tell us that this man was a Samaritan until he is an *ex*-leper on his face at Jesus' feet. Before this moment, his identity was irrelevant. He was sick. The man was dying. What difference did it make if he was Jew or Greek or a Samaritan Gentile? But *now* in his return to Jesus, his identity *does* become significant.

Have you ever wondered what the man would have done if he had *not* turned back? If he had not returned to Jesus, where else would he have gone? I can't imagine that he would have been welcomed at the temple in *Jerusalem*. He was a *Samaritan* after all. Would there have been a priest in the whole city that would have willingly examined him, and declared him clean, and then let him offer his sacrifice of thanksgiving to God? It seems *very* doubtful. Pretty soon, Jesus would declare this temple to be God's house for *all* nations, but there was no home for this ex-leper there now.

But here, here at Jesus' feet, this one cleansed leper found his home. And he was gathered in, the fruit of the Master's labors.

We *too* were outcasts, foreigners to the promises of God, ***"Having no hope and without God in the world."*** (Ephesians 2:12) But this same Jesus has now already been to Jerusalem, and He has stopped along His way and made us clean by the blood of His cross. But have we been made clean, and yet remain blind? No way, because Christ has sent us on our way with His Word to hold on to, and the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes so that we can see clearly—so that we can see ourselves, and so that we can see Jesus. And so that we can see *most of all*, that all we really *need* is Jesus.

And we have Him. We have all that we really need. For forgiveness, for life, for hope, for peace—we have *Jesus*. If He had not gathered us to Himself, where else would we have gone? But here, here at Jesus' feet, we have found our home. Christ has gathered us in, the fruits of His labors.

He gives us Himself, and He also gives us *stuff.* But all of those blessings, they are not the objects of our thankfulness, they're small tokens of God's abounding love. They're like little pieces of the cross, given to you by God to direct your footsteps back to Jesus.

Those nine men, they received those tokens of God's love, and they were content for the time with just their health. They were thankful enough for just the gift. The Samaritan, it's almost like he forgot the cure itself in his gratitude. The Samaritan saw what he needed, and it was nothing more *from* Jesus. It was Jesus Himself. In true thankfulness, may we also forget the gifts and instead focus on Jesus. Because in Him we always have everything we truly need. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen. ***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.