

Pentecost 18 / Thanksgiving / October 9, 2022

Luke 17:15-16

“Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks.”

At Thanksgiving we reflect upon God’s kindness and consider the many blessings He gives us and all people each day of our lives. We need to stop and intentionally count our blessings, because it’s easy to let the darkness in life overshadow the light. Life in this world is a mixture of good and bad, sorrow and happiness. Watch the news or read a newspaper and you would think that nothing but bad things happen. It’s not that good things don’t happen, it’s that bad news is more interesting than good news. It is our natural spiritual tendency to remember and reflect upon the bad more than the good. A salesclerk may meet a hundred friendly people during the course of a day, but at the end of the day she will remember the one person who gave her a hard time. At Thanksgiving we reflect upon the kindnesses of God which sustain us through each day; food, clothing, family, friends, memories of the past and hope for the future. We remember especially and of greatest importance, the kindness of God in giving Christ Jesus to be our Saviour.

The gospel this morning is an example of how readily we receive blessing and how easily we forget to give thanks. Ten men receive healing from a disease that was both physically distressing and socially isolating. Ten men are healed, but only one thinks to return and give thanks to God for the blessing received. It’s easy to focus on the ingratitude of the nine and forget that this incident is not about returning or failing to return thanks. It’s about God’s kindness, which He extends to all people in many ways, every day; regardless of our gratitude or ingratitude. Most of all this gospel is about God’s kindness in Jesus, whom He gave to heal us from the greatest spiritual disease, sin and its ultimate consequence, eternal death. God bestows His grace in forgiveness and kindness in eternal life upon us in Christ, because He loves us. Whether we think to return thanks or not, He loves us. And for that we give Him our greatest thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a time to intentionally give thanks to God for physical blessings of food, clothing, shelter and community, which all people need to live in the world. God gives good gifts to everyone and to all creation. The psalmist sang, *“the eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”* God gives good things to all people because that is the nature of His being. God is love. Jesus healed ten men with leprosy, because He is the fullest expression of God’s love. In Jesus, God expresses His love by giving Him to heal us from the greatest leprosy of the spirit, cleansing us of our sin with His blood, received through faith in Him. God gives many good gifts through the creation, but the greatest gift God gives His human creation is forgiveness and relationship with Him through faith in Jesus as Saviour. The good things we receive from the earth lead us to the greatest thing we receive from God, the kindness of His love in Christ our Saviour.

We don’t receive or deserve God’s blessings because we give thanks. One returned to thank Jesus, that was good, but the other nine remained healed. Their leprosy did not return because of their ingratitude. They were healed because Jesus is good, kind and loving. The nine didn’t make themselves unworthy by failing to return and give thanks. Whether we give thanks or not, no one is worthy of, or in any way deserving of the least of God’s kindnesses. We don’t receive blessings because we deserve them. God blesses us because He loves us. The focal point is the kindness of God in Jesus. All ten were blessed, but the one who returned received a special blessing in that He recognized Jesus as His Saviour. The most important response to God’s blessings is to recognize Jesus as our Saviour. Jesus is God’s greatest undeserved gift of kindness.

Jesus healed the ten lepers in this gospel, not because they deserved it, or because He hoped they would return thanks. He healed them, because He had compassion on them. Compassion is the key. Compassion is to feel pain for another person’s suffering. Compassion is not based upon deserving, or not deserving. Compassion is not conditioned on returning thanks. Compassion is unconditional. Compassion was Jesus feeling pain for the isolation and suffering of ten men and reaching out in love to help them with healing. Compassion is God feeling the pain of the human condition in bondage sin, separated from the fullness of His love and living under the shadow of death. Compassion is God reaching out in love with help and healing for the sake of Christ Jesus. Compassion is not merited by our goodness. Compassion is not revoked by our ingratitude. Compassion is motivated by the kindness of God’s loving heart. Even without His divine foreknowledge, Jesus would have known how most of these men would respond to His gift of healing. It wasn’t a surprise that one returned and the others continued on their way. Jesus knew, but still He healed all ten, not just the one who would return to give

thanks. He did this because of His love and His compassion for human beings. Jesus loves you and in love reaches out to you in compassion with forgiveness, renewal of your spirits and with the promise of perfect healing in eternal life.

Leprosy was a highly stigmatizing disease. People with leprosy were alienated from the rest of society and separated from their families. When approaching others on the road, people with leprosy were compelled by law to give warning by calling out, "*unclean*." If they came too close or failed to give warning, they could be assaulted with stones and put to death. The physical and emotional suffering of people afflicted with leprosy, represents and expresses something of the spiritual condition of human beings in this world, separated from God through sin. Loneliness, sorrow, despair and death are all effects of our broken relationship with God in spirit. We long for peace, but cannot attain it. We seek happiness in so many ways, but cannot find it. We search for fulfilment, but are left feeling empty. We seek to maintain our health and live, but still our health fails and we die. God is the source of life, meaning and fulfilment. Our sin separates us from God.

Jesus healed these ten men afflicted with leprosy, as a sign of the greater spiritual healing He would accomplish on the cross, by which He removed the barrier of our sin; through which He cleanses our spirits so we would live with God, now through faith and fully in His resurrection. It is our sin that has separated us from God. But God who is rich in mercy, reaches out to us in the compassion of His love in Christ Jesus that we would be cleansed of our sins, healed of our wounds and filled with His love through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The ten were healed regardless of whether they gave thanks, because healing is based on the compassion of God's love in Christ Jesus. One man who was healed was a Samaritan. God's compassion extends to all people, for Christ is the Saviour of all people. We give God our highest praise and greatest thanksgiving, because through the word and working of the Holy Spirit, He has opened our hearts to receive Christ and believe in Him as our Saviour.

When we reflect on our lives, we find many reasons to give thanks. We thank God for the medical care available to us today. The medical treatments available today, would have been considered miraculous during Jesus' ministry. Leprosy was once incurable, except by divine intervention. Now it is treatable with 100 percent success. We thank God for our nation and the securities which we enjoy from early childhood to the end of our days. We thank God that even in years when the weather is not advantageous to agriculture that we have a continuous food supply. We thank God that despite all the bad things we do to the earth that it continues to produce an abundant harvest.

We give God our greatest thanks for the spiritual blessings He gives us for the sake of Jesus our Saviour. In compassion He gave His only begotten Son into death on the cross that in Him we would be forgiven our sins and receive the promise of eternal life. How odd that nine members of the covenant community should fail to return thanks to Jesus for healing. How amazing that a stranger to the covenant community should recognize Jesus as the Saviour. It wasn't his own doing; it was the gift of God. We have received the same gift to recognize Jesus as our Saviour through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit. Faith in Christ is the greatest gift. Holding Him in our hearts as Saviour is the greatest thanks we can give to God. A blessed Thanksgiving! In Jesus' Name. Amen