

Thanksgiving Service

November 22, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 17:11-19

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

"Don't forget to say thank you." "Now what do you say to them?" I remember my parents, and have heard many other parents, drilling this into their children again and again. It is a good thing to be taught. When someone does something nice for us or gives us a gift, a proper response is to say "thank you."

But do we ever find that response to be lacking a bit in our world today? I can't remember exactly who it was, but I heard a lecturer refer to the children growing up now as the "give me" generation. He says kids today are always on the take, with their hands open, just expecting all sorts of good things to be given to them. Perhaps just a few weeks ago when candy was handed out for trick or treating you noticed the same thing Lisa and I did - not very many kids said thank you. A postal clerk in the dead-letter office in Washington D.C. studied the mail that came during one Christmas season. Before Christmas thousands & thousands of letters poured in addressed to Santa Claus asking for toys and gifts, whereas after Christmas there was only one post-card saying thank-you to Santa for the gift received.

What does God's Word have to tell us about saying thank you? Actually, it says a whole lot. God wants hearts to come into his courts with thanksgiving. The Lord wants us to come before Him with all our requests with thanksgiving. God wants our lives to reflect gratitude and joy for all our blessings. Today, in this lesson from God's Word, we have a gentle and loving reminder from our Savior so that we: **Don't forget the "thank you."**

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. Due to the hostility that existed between the Jews and Samaritans, Jesus was passing through the customary route between Samaria and Galilee. We read here "*as he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him.*" Leprosy might not be familiar to many of us but it was an especially dreadful & terrible disease. This disease had physical, social, and religious disadvantages for those carrying it. Some physical ailments were whitish pocks which ate the flesh bit by bit by bit until finally it consumed the bones. Other symptoms were a violent fever with sleeplessness and heavy dreams. Most leprosy left very little chance of cure which gave people the feelings of complete hopelessness. Those are only the physical ailments.

In a social respect, because of this contagious disease, the leper was excluded from his family and from associating with others. The lepers were confined to a society of their own, usually gathered some distance away from places where others lived (2 Kings 7, Matt 8). Food for them was deposited in prearranged places. They went bareheaded with a covered chin, and when anyone came close they were to yell out "*unclean, unclean*" to announce themselves as lepers so that no one would come too close.

Finally, religiously, the leper was unclean and, therefore, excluded from worship. Lepers were looked down at because the disease was generally considered to be an immediate act of divine punishment from God. In the extraordinary rare case of healing, it was only by an official declaration of the priest and after a prescribed sacrifice (Lev. 13, 14) that a leper was again received back into the religious community.

Now think of how fortunate these lepers actually were to see in the distance the One who gives hope to the hopeless. How blessed these men were to call out in faith to Jesus who shows mercy to the undeserving and gives life to the dead. Imagine how awesome it must have been to receive this gift directly from the Giver of every good gift. For when these men do the right thing by turning to Jesus and crying at the top of their voices, "***Jesus, Master, have pity on us,***" Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests, "***and on the way, they are cleansed.***"

What kind of response would we expect from these ten men miraculously cured from this deadly disease? Wouldn't you imagine a thankful heart unlike any other? Wouldn't we expect them to run to Jesus and praise His holy Name? Don't you think they would want to give Jesus a big hug, fall before Him and say "*anything for you Jesus, just say the word and I will do it for you?*" Wouldn't you expect lives dedicated to the One who loved and saved them from leprosy? We do see such a response from one man. "***One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan.***"

But here is where the account becomes kind of sad. Only one returns to say "*thank you.*" Only this Samaritan man comes back to praise Jesus for this great gift. We are not told why, but maybe the other nine had good reasons in their minds. Perhaps they were eager to show themselves to the priests as Jesus told them. I'm sure they were excited about seeing friends and family again. I bet they could not wait to get back to their lives and regular schedules. Whatever it was, the other nine were on their way and did not take the time to say "*thank you*" to Jesus. ***Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"*** Every time I read these words I always picture sadness in Jesus' voice and heart. I think of a father disappointed in a child. How could no one else return and praise God except for this one?

So where do we fit into all this? Are we more like the one thankful leper or like the other nine? Don't we all have to confess that there have been times that we have not returned to praise God? Have we ever asked the Lord for something, got it, but then forgot to say "*thank you?*" Do we ever think Jesus looks at our congregation on a Sunday morning or at a Bible Study and with a sad voice asks: "*Where are the other nine?*" Do our lives reflect true thankfulness for all the physical & spiritual blessings the Lord in His mercy so graciously pours out for us? Does the percentage of our income we give back for the Lord's work, or the things we do to serve God with the abilities He

gives us, or the amount of time we spend in His Word, or the way we worship and praise Jesus, reflect a extremely grateful and thankful heart or something a little less? Sometimes we sinners need a gentle and loving reminder so that we don't forget the thank you.

However we get much more than just this reminder from Jesus. We get a Savior who still goes to Jerusalem to die - even for lepers who didn't come back to say thank you. We get a Savior who all His life remembered to say thanks for every gift of God. We have a Savior who displayed gratitude and joy in His life at all times and in all places. And this Savior did all this perfectly in our place. Jesus did it all so you and I can be righteous before God and cleansed of a disease far worse than leprosy. Then Jesus became the leper for us. Jesus was infected with our sins and cut off and condemned for them on the cross. While we were still sinners Christ died for us! And on the third day, Jesus rose from His grave to give hope to the hopeless and life to the dead. Now Jesus still has mercy on the undeserving. Jesus has made you and I clean and healthy by washing us with His precious blood. You are no longer cut off from the Father in heaven: ***"who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion"*** (Psalm 103).

That is why, dear friends, today you are like that one leper who returned. That's why instead of just looking around at the empty seats this morning, the Father in heaven also has a reason to smile. You are here today to say thank you. That's part of what we do in worship every week. You are here to praise your God and Savior. You are here in faith. That is what Jesus said to the Samaritan man who returned, didn't He? ***"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."***

When it comes right down to it, isn't this what faith is all about? Isn't faith really just like a big "thank you?" Faith is nothing more than giving Jesus a great big hug for all He has done for us - a trust that wraps our arms around Jesus and says *"thank you."* *"Thank you Jesus for living for me, and dying for me, and saving me."* *"Thank you for giving me hope and heaven."* *"Thank you for your unending love and mercy and all you do for me."* *"Thank you for your countless promises."* And this is why we pray the Holy Spirit continues to work in our hearts so that we don't ever forget the thank you. Jesus has done it all. Count your blessings this Thanksgiving. Recognize the source of them all. See how Jesus has lovingly saved us from something much more dreadful than leprosy. Then there can be only one proper response. *"Jesus, I love you. Anything you want Jesus - I know I can never repay you - so I want to praise your Holy Name."* ***"Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endures forever."*** Amen.

