

Giving Thanks Luke 17:11-19

Adapted from "Giving Thanks" by David Washburn @ SermonCentral.Com

How often do we find ourselves prompting our children to say "thank you?" Whenever they're offered a treat from a friend or an adult helps them out, we find ourselves asking, "Now, what do you say?" We want our children to be respectful and use good manners; this is why we teach them to say "thank you," but I wonder if in our attempt to produce properly mannered children, we actually overlook the thankfulness within "thank you."

How do we, and how do we bring our children to a place where thankfulness is more than just being polite, but rather a recognizable part of ours and their lives?

Now that even our one annual official day for giving thanks has been overshadowed by the consumerist frenzy of Black Friday, how do we daily live out an attitude of thankfulness?

A few years ago, the Peanuts cartoon pictured Charlie Brown bringing out Snoopy's dinner on Thanksgiving Day. But it was just his usual dog food in a bowl. Snoopy took one look at the dog food and said, *"This isn't fair. The rest of the world is eating turkey with all the trimmings, and all I get is dog food. Because I'm a dog, all I get is dog food."* He stood there and stared at his dog food for a moment, and said, *"I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."*

There was very little joy in Snoopy's thankfulness, for his thankfulness was based on a comparison. His thankfulness was based on the fact that he was better off than the turkey. Therein lies a small lesson; when we're down in the dumps and full of complaints because life isn't fair, we should recognize that there are so many others far worse off than we are. We should stop complaining, but when it comes to our thankfulness, the basis should never be, "Whew, am I thankful that I'm not her," or "I am so thankful I don't have to live like that."

That's because thankfulness should be so much more than a comparison of our own situation to someone else's. Thankfulness is so much more than having enough food to eat, a nice, warm home to live in, good health, or financial security. Each of those circumstances can be taken from us in an instant. Thankfulness is a state of being and a way of life, but we usually fail to live in a state of thankfulness because we take the bounty we now live in for granted.

We're like the world traveler who has been everywhere and seen everything and takes for granted the blessing and beauty of all that he has seen. We have become so accustomed to our blessings that they fail to excite us and generate thankfulness; we take them for granted.

Emerson said that if the stars came out only once a year, everybody would stay up all night to behold them. We have seen the stars so often that we don't bother to look at them anymore. In like manner, we have grown accustomed to our blessings, and quite frankly, we've become spoiled.

In this morning's Gospel reading, Luke shares with us the account of one leper who was not spoiled. There have been many guesses as to why the other nine didn't return to thank Jesus, but our focus is not on the nine, but on the one who was thankful, for he provides us with some very important lessons on thankfulness.

First of all, being thankful is not only expressed through prayer and public proclamation, but through your attitude in living life. I doubt this leper had a great deal of joy in having leprosy. Lepers were shunned by society. They had to live outside the city. They had to ring bells and shout "unclean" so others could be warned to stay away. The first century belief was that God gave leprosy to punish those who were sinful and disobedient.

This was doubly bad for this one leper because probably the other nine, being Jewish, could be declared clean by the priests, but this man was a foreigner. He was welcomed in the leper colony as long as they were all outcasts. But once the other nine were cleansed, he would now be shunned as "un-kosher," as the rest sought to return to their place in the community. He was even outcast by the outcasts.

If this was your station in your life, being looked down upon by society, being told that you have leprosy because you've found disfavor with God; and even when cleansed still considered a foreigner, I wonder how much joy and thankfulness would exist in your life? But it seems that this leper maintained a spirit of joy and thankfulness, in spite of his diseased or foreign status, and this enabled him to more fully appreciate what Christ had done for him.

In our life, we have all experienced times of "leprosy" or being a foreigner; a time where we felt separated and alone: whether it was from a prolonged illness, the death of a husband, or the loss of a job, the dissolving of a marriage, or the breaking of a friendship. We've all had circumstances in life where we've lived alone, outside the city, where we've paused and asked, "God, what did I do to deserve this?" In the last few weeks, I have seen multiple Facebook postings where followers of one candidate or the other have announced that they were "unfriending" anyone who dared to vote for the enemy. Really?! Are we willing to dump friends over political disagreements?

My understanding and my relationship with God informs me that the leper didn't deserve this disease and neither should we "unfriend" anyone just for politically disagreeing with us.

So, what are we to think about in our own times with "leprosy?" Do we share something else in common with the one leper; do we also share his thankful attitude?

Does your life exude a spirit of thankfulness? I am sure that every one of us knows one of those people who have a certain expression, an attitude, a constant aura of happiness and thankfulness for life. Are you one of those always thankful people or are you more like Snoopy, whose thankfulness was based on comparison? Being thankful is so much more than a comparison of circumstances. Being thankful is so much more than a private prayer or public proclamation. Being thankful is expressed through your daily attitude in living life.

Speaking of Snoopy, did you hear that after 31 years as the Met Life mascot, he has now been retired (1985-2016)? I am sure that he has much more to be thankful for this year since his pension should at least buy him, if not turkey, at least some of those better grades of dog food they are now advertising on TV. Speaking of which, I don't know if this bothers you, but it has begun to bother me--the thought that even our pets now eat better than many people around this world. I saw an article the other day which stated that no one in the United States should complain about not being in the top 1%--because compared with the rest of the world, we all live in the top 1%.

So this one leper can teach us that our thankfulness should not be based on comparison, but on a way of living that is thankful for whatever we have. A second thing this leper can teach us is that thankfulness completes healing.

Healing means to be made whole, and while all ten of the lepers found physical healing, only one found wholeness. The nine went to their priest--as they were told--so they could resume their normal lives. But one took the time to turn around and thank God--whom he knew was his healer. In the closing of his letter to the Colossians, as Paul does in most of his letters, he lists the way that we people of faith should live every day as an act of thanksgiving to God for our healing.

We should:

1. Clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
2. Bear with one another and forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you
3. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together.
4. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
5. And be thankful.
6. And let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
7. And with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God

8. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Thankfulness is an attitude. Thankfulness is a way of life. Thankfulness enables healing to bring wholeness. And finally, those who receive life as a gift to be lived in dependence upon God will be characterized by gratitude that drives them into the community of God's people. That's part of why we gather together each week. Yes, a relationship with God is personal and not dependent upon the Church, but God's desire is that we live out our faith in community with fellow believers.

When we live life with a spirit of thankfulness, we realize that life is a gift...a gift from God, and in gratitude for that gift, we are driven into the community of God's people.

Thanksgiving is so much more than food and football. Even though Thanksgiving is a national holiday originally sanctioned by the federal government, it was set aside to offer thanks to God. Hear the words of George Washington in proclaiming the first Thanksgiving holiday:

"Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; Whereas, both the houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness!" Now therefore, I do recommend next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks..."

"*Beneficent Author, humble thanks, obey His will, grateful for His benefits.*" These are the phrases spoken over 200 years ago in describing the first official Thanksgiving holiday. Let's not lose sight of what this week is about:

- Being thankful is an attitude for living life,
- Thankfulness is a part of being made whole, and
- Thankfulness is recognizing life as a gift from God that drives us into the community of God's people.

Amen?