

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity  
St. Luke 17:11-19: "Thank Who?"  
September 17, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever. Amen.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." / When He saw them He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. / 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. Now he was a Samaritan. / Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, to whom belongs "blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might... forever and ever" (Rev. 7:12), dear fellow redeemed:

Whether you are a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, an employer or an employee; whether you are a prince or a peasant; whether you are young or old – if someone kindly gives you something or does something for you, two words are expected in response. They are not hard to remember or hard to say. They are the words, "Thank you." These simple words do not look like much at face value, but they have a tremendous effect. They show a person that you recognize their kind deed, and that you appreciate them.

These words are so common in our vocabulary, that our ears might hardly hear them when they are spoken to us. But the absence of these words is a message heard loud and clear. As easily as we might shrug off a thank you, it is much more difficult to forget ingratitude. When we have gone out of our way to help someone, and they don't acknowledge our sacrifice, we feel used and insulted. We won't be so ready to help that person again, THANK YOU VERY MUCH! So in some way, we understand what our God and Lord puts up with every minute of every day.

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What good thing do you have that was not ultimately from God? He gives us exactly what we ask for. He gives us our daily bread, which includes plenty to eat and drink, clothes to wear, a place to live, family and friends to care for us, authorities to protect us, medical professionals to assist us. The heart that beats in our chest is from God, the air that we breathe, the beautiful

land we see all around us. And how do we thank Him? We complain when something does not go just the way we want. We wonder why God does not give us better things and more things. We focus so much on what we lack that we fail to see all that we have. How ungrateful!

What does the Lord do about that ungratefulness? I know what I would do. I would take back the good things until everyone learned to appreciate them. Isn't that what you would do? Let's say you brought a plate of food or a glass of water to a child, and the child said, "It's about time! It took you long enough! Why didn't you bring me more! Why didn't you fill the glass higher!" What I would do, and I think you might too, is snatch away that plate or glass until the child showed some respect and exhibited a little gratitude. To do anything less is to let him become a spoiled brat.

It's amazing how quickly children's attitudes can change when they realize they are in danger of losing good things. Just like that, complaining and whining can give way to ever-so-sweet "pleases" and "thank yous." But sometimes they need to learn the consequences of ungrateful behavior. They need to learn that ungratefulness is indeed a sin, not only against their parents, but also against God.

Today's text speaks of this sin. Jesus had just healed ten men of leprosy, a terrible disease of the skin. He had mercy on them just as they asked. And yet only one out of ten came back to thank Him. Their ingratitude did not cause Jesus to take back the healing. He did not lose patience with them. But He did address their selfish behavior with words of condemnation: *"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"*

He could ask the same thing about our response to the blessings He gives us. "I gave you a good job to provide for your family, and all you can do is complain about it?" "I gave you a healthy body and mind, and this is how you put them to use?" "I gave you a God-fearing spouse, and all you can do is pick at little faults?" "I gave you children, and you resent having to raise them?" "I gave you eternal salvation, and all you care about is earthly prosperity?" "Is this how you thank Me?"

Who can argue with these words? Who among us has not ignored the great blessings right in front of us? We are everything God's law accuses us of being—sinners who deserve the wrath of God. And yet the Lord has taught us to cry out to Him for mercy. We would not do this, if we did not know He was merciful. The lepers believed this about Him too. They had heard how Jesus preached good news, and how He healed the sick and hurting for no charge. They called out to Him, saying, *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"*

Whether or not in His state of humiliation Jesus knew how the men would react to their healing, He still helped them. The possibility of future ingratitude did not stop Jesus from showing present mercy. He directed the men to show themselves to the priests, and as they went, they were cleansed, healed. We do not know what happened to these men. Perhaps upon reflection, they realized they let their good fortune cloud their thinking and regretted not coming back to Jesus. Maybe later they became His devoted followers.

Not knowing what God has planned for our neighbor's future, we should not let ingratitude on one occasion discourage us from showing love to them on another. Perhaps those constant acts

of love will chip away at a hardened, calloused heart, and lead one day to repentance and faith by God's grace. You can probably think of an example of this happening in a marriage. A believer's love for her unbelieving spouse eventually led him to hear God's Word and trust in Jesus (1Cor. 7:16). Even the crankiest and most selfish unbeliever is not beyond the heart-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

## II

The same love that God would have us show even to an ungrateful neighbor is the love that God perfectly shows us. He knows very well what we will do with His gifts. We will take them for granted. We will use them for ungodly purposes. We may even despise them like the Israelites despised the manna and quail in the wilderness – the only food they had! But God still gives. He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:16). “[H]e makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt. 5:45).

Beyond that, God even provided for our salvation. He sent His Son to save us when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10). Jesus deserved a warm welcome from the world of men, but instead received the cold shoulder. He miraculously gave good things, and the people cared more about those temporal things than about Him. Never in history has more ingratitude been shown than how we treated our Savior. Even when He was going to the cross to pay for our sins, all He received in thanks was shame and derision. He said of Himself, *“I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people”* (Ps. 22:6).

None of us would go even one inch forward on the lonely way Jesus walked. That is because none of us loves like God does. We cannot fathom how He would do so much for those who deserved nothing. We cannot understand how Jesus could say, *“Father, forgive them,”* while He was being condemned and crucified. But this is our God. He is *“a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”* (Ex. 34:6). He has mercy upon those who cry to Him for help, and even upon those who don't. He does not give to get something in return. He does not bless only when proper gratitude is shown. Like we see in the healing of the ten lepers, He had mercy even on the self-centered.

We sinners should gratefully acknowledge His goodness and grace. We, like the Samaritan, should thank Him – not just with words but with actions too. Our life should be an offering of thanks and praise to Him who has given us all that we need. Because He gives good things by the hands of others, we thank Him in part by thanking our neighbor. God is the one who gives parents to care for their children, friends to encourage one another, and neighbors to help each other. So when we express gratitude and thanks to them, God hears it as gratitude and thanks to Him. And when we fail to give thanks to others due to our selfishness, God sees it as ingratitude towards Him.

For those moments of ingratitude, we fall on our faces at Jesus' feet, and beg for His mercy. And He gives it as He has done so often in the past. He forgives us for failing to acknowledge His blessings, and He promises to continue to give them. He is pleased with all who trust His Word of grace, as the Samaritan did to whom Jesus said, *“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”* No sins were counted against this man, who praised not himself or his good fortune, but his God who saved him. In the same manner, God counts no sins against you, but says to you, *“Rise and go your way,”* for you are justified in His sight by faith.

It is no mystery who deserves the thanks and praise of all. It is not we ourselves, but the One who has given us all good things. He deserves our thanks at the dawning and closing of each day and every time in between. And when we are taken to join all the saints and angels in heaven, we will have the opportunity to say “thank you” to God face to face and to sing His eternal praises.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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