

100922 Sermon "Give Thanks" Luke 17:11-19

A little boy was asked to pray for dinner. Before he bowed his head to pray, he looked at the dish. Then, closing his eyes he prayed, "Lord, I don't like the looks of it, but I'll thank you and eat it anyway."

The passage of Luke 17:11-19 tells us a story about how ten lepers came to Jesus and asked for mercy. He is in the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he enters a village, ten lepers approach calling out to him but keeping their distance because they are unclean according to the law at that time. They call out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Jesus immediately sends them to show themselves to the priests to confirm their healing. And along the way they are in fact made clean. This story could have ended like this.

One of them, however, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. Only one returned to Jesus and bowed before him in thanksgiving. Only after he prostrated himself in thanksgiving do we learn that the one who has turned back is a Samaritan. Samaritans were the unlovely outsiders in Jesus' day.

Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

This time, let's look at this story from a slightly different angle. At first, ten lepers asked Jesus for mercy. We do not know what the specific mercy they demanded of the Lord was. Maybe you think they asked the Lord for some money or something to eat. However, considering that Jesus was famous for his miracles and words at the time, they must have come before the Lord for the purpose of healing.

So at first, all ten lepers had the goal of "solving their problem" itself. However, the moment their problem was solved, only one person had another purpose. And he returned to the Lord. For what purpose did he return? Yes, to glorify God... to give thanks to the Lord and bow down before the Lord. What did it mean to bow down two thousand years ago?

We use the word worship, which means "to show respect, to bow down." If so, we could think of the worshiper through the expression of bowing down here. All ten of them had their physical problems resolved immediately, but only one returned to the Lord as a worshiper to glorify God.

As you read the Gospels carefully, there are so many miracle stories recorded there, but Jesus did not pay attention to "the work of miracles" or "the resolution of problems" itself. Even if people come to the Lord through their own life problems, Jesus want them to come to see him as their savior in the end.

Usually, people start their life of faith because of their own problems. That's ok. However, it could be the starting point of our Christian life, but solving the problem itself should not be the end point of our prayers and our Christian life.

When trouble is ahead of us, we desperately hope and pray that it will be resolved, like the ten lepers. However, when the problem actually disappears, there are many times when we overjoy ourselves and go on our way, instead of returning to God. And then often think, "Now it was about time for things to work out." Or "I did a good job and the problem was solved".

When we look at this story, we learn that we Christians should not stop at solving the problem itself, but look back on God's mercy and return to the Lord like one healed and saved leper who returned to Jesus. Just as he prostrated himself before the Lord, as a worshiper, we also want to bow before the Lord and give thanks.

You may have heard of the phrase "Coram Deo." In Latin, it means "in the presence of God." This is a word that the 16th-century Reformers used to challenge medieval Christians to live a wakeful life for God. "Coram Deo" was the foundation of the five slogans of the Reformers: Sola Scriptura / Sola Fide / Sola Gratia / Solus Christus / Soli Deo Gloria. The five solas state that Christians are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed by Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

What would "Coram Deo" mean for us today? It refers to living consciously of God every day, moment by moment, even though our journey in this world is difficult at times. Psalm 117:2 says, "For great is his steadfast love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!"

Helen Keller, American Author and educator who was blind and deaf and passed in Westport CT, said, "So much has been given to me that I have no time to ponder that which I don't have."

An unknown person left this comment: "Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it."

An American Christian worship song, "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart" dates back in the late 1970s. It was penned by a young seminary graduate Henry Smith in 1978. Every song has its own story to tell but what matters is the heart behind every word written in it. "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart" was conceived by Smith during a difficult time in his life. Instead of being sour and bitter, he turned his experience into a positive one and became grateful.

After graduating from university, Smith had trouble looking for a job. Also, he suffered from a degenerative eye condition which would later leave him legally blind. However, he never lost hope. While at his church in Williamsburg in Virginia, his pastor shared a verse from the Bible that goes: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

This scripture tugged Smith at the heartstrings. He realized how Jesus made himself poor just to make others rich through him. Finding hope in the scripture, Smith crafted the song of thanksgiving and trust. He later called it "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart."

Give thanks with a grateful heart. Give thanks to the Holy One.

Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say, "I am strong" Let the poor say, "I am rich"

Because of what the Lord has done for us. Give thanks.

(Unraveling the Heart Behind "Give Thanks", Country Thang Daily, August 23, 2019)

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, as ten lepers came to Jesus, it is a precious thing that we also sit in the service of worshiping the Lord on the Lord's Day. You may have seen Jesus as a good teacher initially, but now believe that Jesus is the savior who has washed away our sins and saved us from sin and death. How is your situation these days? Your home, your children, your health, your workplace... Maybe you don't like the looks of it, but give thanks with a grateful heart. Give thanks to the holy one. Give thanks because God has given Jesus Christ his son. Whatever your situation, I pray that God's grace will make you and your situation well. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.