

Thanksgiving Eve
November 26, 2008
Luke 17:11-19

“Giving Thanks”

Thanksgiving is upon us, and some people have discovered multiple uses for turkey. Residents of Cincinnati, Ohio, do outdoor bowling with frozen turkeys. And in the news, there was a story of a shopper in a mall who was confronted in the parking lot by someone who wanted to steal her car. Before the carjacking could take place, another shopper came up from behind and used a frozen turkey to hit thief on the head. He did get away, but was later apprehended by police, being easily identified because of his head injury. Although Thanksgiving is not a religious holiday per se, to give thanks to God our Maker and Redeemer is very much part of the Christian life, and that not just on the last Thursday of November, but every day. With the economic downturn in our nation, what will Thanksgiving 2008 look like? Will our giving of thanks this year be diminished because the economy is diminished? So often we equate material goods with God’s blessings, and when those material goods are in short supply or removed, we may be tempted to think that God has withdrawn his blessing from us. Not true! As Dr. Harry Wendt, author of *Crossways!* Bible study, puts it: “Jesus never links being blessed to acquiring material goods. He links it only to devoting life to reflecting His servant ministry in all we think, say, and do” (*Crossways!* Leader’s Manual, p. 14). On this Thanksgiving Eve, the message for this evening, rising up out of the Gospel lesson, is entitled “Giving Thanks.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

Today’s Gospel lesson, the account of Jesus’ healing of the ten lepers, illustrates how often we forget to give thanks to God, even when his gifts are right before our eyes – like being miraculously healed of leprosy! So, with only one of the ten lepers returning to give thanks, that means Jesus’ return on his investment, so to speak, was 10%. Not so good – or maybe not so bad, as things stand right now in our nation. How richly blessed we are to know God as our Maker and Redeemer! Even if all the material goods we possess (which aren’t really ours in the first place – they are just on loan to us from God to manage) were taken away, our relationship with that gracious God remains intact. So, whether we have a lot or a little, our calling as people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus is to offer thanks and praise to God, like that Samaritan man, prostrating ourselves at the feet of Jesus and thanking him. And our giving of thanks is not just for material things, but for the deeper and richer blessings in life that go far beyond material goods. There is a marvelous hymn which speaks to this giving of thanks. The words are very moving and call us to a truer giving of thanks:

*Forgive us, Lord, for shallow thankfulness,
For dull content with warmth and sheltered care,
For songs of praise for food and harvest press,
While of Your richer gifts we’re unaware.*

*Teach us to thank You, Lord, for love and grace,
For life and vision, for a purpose clear,
For Christ Your Son, and for each human face
That shows Your message ever new and near.*

*Forgive us, Lord, for feast that knows not fast,
For joy in things that meanwhile starve the soul,
For walls and wars that hide Your mercies vast
And blur our vision of the Kingdom goal.*

*Open our eyes to see Your love's intent,
To know with minds and hearts its depth and height;
May thankfulness be days in service spent,
Reflection of Christ's life and love and light.*

(William Watkins Reid, Sr., 1890-1983, Lutheran Service Book, #788)

Don't you sometimes wonder about the "rest of the story" with these different people mentioned in the Scriptures, like the unnamed Samaritan man cleansed of his leprosy? Was his life different after meeting Jesus? I'd like to think it was, and that Jesus' healing of him put him on a new path in life. After he came to know Jesus, I imagine that this man saw each and every day in a new light, and that he continually pointed people to Jesus of Nazareth who had healed him and restored his life. I imagine that each and every day for this man was a day of thanksgiving, and so it ought to be for us as well. The late writer, columnist, and humorist, Erma Bombeck author of *Life Is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank*, wrote the following, which seems to capture what that one leper, the Samaritan, would say after he returned to give thanks to Jesus: "If I had to live my life over again... I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day. I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage. I would have talked less and listened more. I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained, or the sofa faded. I would have eaten the popcorn in the "good" living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace. I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth. I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been done. I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains. I would have cried and laughed less while watching television, and more while watching life. I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil, or was guaranteed to last a lifetime. When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, "Later. Now go get washed up for dinner." There would have been more "I love you's." More "I'm sorry's." But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute, look at it and really see it, live it, and never give it back."

On this Thanksgiving Eve in the year of our Lord 2008, let us take our cue from that Samaritan man and falling at the feet of Jesus, give thanks to him for his grace and mercy, and for all of his blessings. Together with the psalmist, we pray: "**O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; and his steadfast love endures forever**" (Psalm 107:1). Amen.