

Luke 17:11-19

This Thanksgiving millions of Americans will be celebrating and giving thanks with less. It's no secret that families across our country and in our city are feeling the pinch. Jobs are lost, money isn't there like it used to be, and people are forced to watch every penny. But despite the tight-budgets and personal troubles, we still gather and give thanks. The lepers in our account from Luke are definitely a group of people who were giving thanks despite having less than your average Israelite. So today it's a good for us too, to take a moment and reflect on why we give thanks. Why do we take the time on a Thursday morning in November to gather in God's house and hear his Word and sing his praises? Why are we here when many are at home watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, and many more are still sleeping? Certainly we're not here to focus our thoughts on turkey and stuffing, but on something and someone far more life-changing. Our focus today is on the same One who stepped into the lives of these ten lepers. Thanksgiving still matters today because **"Miraculous Mercy Leads to Living-Thanks!"**

In the gospel reading before us, Saint Luke tells us, "Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee." Jesus was traveling to the city of his destiny, Jerusalem. A few months earlier Jesus had set out resolutely for the city of David, and he knew what awaited him there. He was going to Jerusalem to face his own suffering and death. He told his disciples again and again about God's plan of miraculous mercy for us.

But before he could get there, he ran into this band of lepers—ten men, all afflicted with the same sort of debilitating skin disease, all social outcasts who called to Jesus from a distance. By standing at a distance, these lepers were following the laws which singled them out as "Unclean!" Their appearance and behavior were supposed to tell the world that they were the bearers of infection. A leper was supposed to grow out his hair, wear torn clothes, and keep the bottom half of his face covered. He was as good as dead, cut off from priests and people, from temple and sacrifice, spiritually excluded from all the blessings of God's people.

The disease of leprosy, and the way God wanted his people to deal with it, remind us of the disease of sin. By nature you and I are spiritually sick with the debilitating disease of sin. Leprosy can picture for us a sad spiritual truth: left on our own you and I are as good as dead eternally; we're cut off from God's family and excluded from his blessing of eternal life in heaven. You and I need Jesus' miraculous mercy and healing—you and I need our Savior's love just as much as those lepers did.

So, the ten leprous men asked for mercy from the Master. They trusted him for healing and rescue, and so they cried out, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" Their words are the same words we use every Sunday when we ask God, "Have mercy on me!" *Eleison!* Their condition was hopeless—an incurable disease, a lonely existence separated from God's people, and a lifetime of suffering. Yet, their one hope was this Teacher from Nazareth who had healed others. They had, no doubt, heard of Jesus' great power. Maybe, just maybe, this Jesus would cure them. Maybe, just maybe, they would be able to go home and see their families again—to hug their wives and pick up their children; to see their families and laugh with friends. Maybe, just maybe, this Jesus would make a difference for them.

I can only imagine what went through their minds when Jesus said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests!” There was only one reason to go to the priests. The priests were the ones in charge of quarantine decisions in Israel. No doctor or nurse would make the call for these lepers. They needed a clean bill of health from a priest. Only then could they return to their lives, from which they had been separated for so long. So, when Jesus said, “Go to the priests!” these lepers knew they were in for a miracle. As they went, they were cleansed. Their flesh was no longer falling off or white as snow—they were healed, and Jesus was showing miraculous mercy.

Have you considered the mercy Jesus shows you in your life? God’s mercy is his love which considers our misery. God’s mercy is his love, which takes into account our pitiful state. He knows how much we need him. He knows and he acts. He’s already at work for you. Our Savior did not shrink from giving up his life. We cry out, “Have mercy on us!” and he gives us his promise. “Go, you are forgiven!” His death has washed away the stain of your sins. When God looks at you he sees a perfect person, not someone infected with sin or living with a sorted past. He sees a spiritually healthy person. That’s a reason to give God thanks!

But how did the lepers react to Jesus’ mercy and pity? Luke tells us, “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.” One of the lepers returned! Thank God he recognized the miracle and he made sure to acknowledge the One who had worked the miracle.

Jesus, though, asked, “Where not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God expect this foreigner?” Jesus didn’t ask these questions for his own benefit. He knew where the other nine were. He asked them for our sake. Where are the other nine? Why hadn’t they returned to say thanks? What gives?

Before we condemn these nine other lepers, I want you to put yourself in their sandals. You’ve been living in a secluded leper colony for years. You’ve lost a finger or two. Your skin has fallen off and your friends and family don’t come to visit you. Your spouse would barely recognize you. But then there’s this Jesus. He tells you to go to the priest and the priest announces you’re clean and healthy. What do you do? What is your first reaction? Is it to run back to the Master you just acknowledged? Or do you want to run home and see your family and friends? Are you floored by the mercy of Jesus? Or are you more excited to get back to your life? Those lepers were filled with their own needs and wants. Jesus didn’t fit. I imagine they were happy and somewhat thankful—how could you not be? You had just been cured from leprosy! But how did they respond to that mercy?

The other nine men had the faith that Jesus could heal them, and they were healed. But they didn’t connect that faith to it’s power Source. They didn’t acknowledge Jesus as the one-of-a-kind Healer he truly was. They didn’t go back and say ‘thank you’. And because they didn’t they missed out on an even greater blessing. Someone might say, “Well, they were going to go back later and thank Jesus. Is that so wrong?” Jesus says, “Yes, it is!” Now is the day of his favor! Now is the time to seek him! The nine missed the true Savior who came into the world. They missed out on the message of forgiveness and love in that same Jesus, who loved them and healed them. They missed out on the chance to live thanks!

Dear friends, the same temptations exist for you and me today. We hear of forgiveness and love, healing and mercy from our Savior Jesus, and what do we do? Are we running to him or away from him? In our world of fast paced schedules and jam packed appointments, a day like Thanksgiving is good because it gives us an opportunity to do some soul searching. We can pause and reflect. By the Spirit's power, we can adjust our priorities. By Christ Jesus ruling your heart by faith, you can say, "Christ help me to put you first. Show me the way to live thanks every single day, not just on Thanksgiving!"

We have the ability to refocus because **Miraculous Mercy leads to living thanks.** The one leper thanked Jesus and wasn't afraid to throw himself at his feet. Jesus' mercy had changed his life! And he was a Samaritan! He wasn't even one of the children of Israel, one of the Jews. He was a half-breed combination of heathens and left-over Israelites. You and I aren't ethnic Jews, but we certainly enjoy the blessings of Christ himself. There's only one response worthy of all the gifts he gives. We live thankfully, recognizing his mercy and praising God for his action. Without him we'd be left alone and lost. But in him, life has meaning and we have a real reason to give thanks.

Thank God he has brought us here today! Jesus' mercy leads to Living-Thanks, just as we are doing right now. We are here as a fruit of the faith God has created in our hearts. God makes us who we are in Christ Jesus. He makes us healthy and clean, and then he empowers us to live boldly and give thanks! You and I can take our cues from this Samaritan and give thanks to God. Wherever we are in life, whatever we have, even if it's less this year—it's all worth giving thanks for. **Jesus mercy leads to thankful living!** We thank God because he gives everything according to his wisdom and God knows what we need. He knows if we need to keep living with less, and he know if it's time for our checkbooks to bounce back. He knows how to take care of our souls, so he naturally knows how to take care of our bodies too. **Jesus' mercy changes our lives! AMEN.**

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