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Thanksgiving – Luke 17:11-19 - Faith Gives Thanks to God

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It's pretty common to turn on the TV or go on the internet and see stories and videos about someone who recovered from some serious illness. The typical interview goes something like this: "I just fought every day and wouldn't quit. I refused to lose, and that is why I won the battle with..." And of course that's followed by praise for their strong will and never-give-up attitude that got them through the whole process. It makes for compelling entertainment, but if there's no mention of modern medicine and technology and health service, as well as the One who *provides* us with health and everything that goes into preserving it, there's just something missing.

That was the case in our Gospel lesson for today. Jesus did an amazing miracle of healing – but of the ten lepers he healed, he never again saw nine of them. But that one who came back – he teaches us a lesson we can all afford to think about more than just when we're celebrating Thanksgiving. The focus of those nine was inward, but that last man's focus was heavenward – and that really showcases the proper reaction to all of God's gifts from a faithful believer: a living faith gives thanks to the God who sustains us on earth and saves us for heaven.

So the outlook was not good for the ten men Jesus met that day. Leprosy was a terminal disease back in those days, a disease where the tips of your appendages began to lose nerve function and die, essentially rolling out the welcome mat for all kinds of other infections and diseases that would make short work of the rest of your immune system. These were dead men walking in a very real sense, and they were out of options. Leprosy was considered to be very contagious and easily communicable in those days, so lepers had to live in colonies outside of normal settlements away from their families, their homes, or any kind of medical help they might otherwise be able to receive. They understood the grind of quarantine as well as anybody! So when they saw Jesus, the famous miracle worker, coming down the road, they were quick to call his name and ask him for pity. A smart plan, no question about it. Now whether or not they believed in Jesus as their Savior from sin, we can't say. But what we can say is that they trusted him to help when no one else would or could.

And Jesus didn't let them down. With just a word – "*Go, show yourselves to the priests*" – he sent them down the road and cleansed them. It was an unbelievable show of miraculous power that displayed for them what Jesus came here to prove to all of us: he is God in the flesh, come down from heaven to fix sin's brokenness and bring healing to a sick and dying world.

With just a word, Jesus gave them their lives back. They could see their families again – hug their parents again, kiss their wives again, hold their children again, rejoin civilization not as an outcast but as a welcome member of the community. Their health was as good as new, and look

at all the blessings that came with it, that like many of us they probably took for granted before this. They could live again, and they could dream again. It really put everything in perspective.

Well, at least it did for one of them. Let's try not to be too hard on the other nine who didn't come back to Jesus – maybe they just got caught up in the excitement of it all. We've all been there. But in any case, even if we can understand what happened, that still doesn't excuse them for not giving credit where credit was due. One man, though, did exactly as Jesus wanted him to. This Samaritan – a longtime enemy of the Jews – was no enemy to Jesus, at least not anymore. He "*came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.*"

Because of what Jesus did, he praised God for everyone to hear. Because of what Jesus did, he threw himself at Jesus' feet. I think it's safe to say he got the point of who Jesus was and what he was here to do. This was a special kind of love and mercy Jesus showed to this man that was unlike anything he had ever seen. Jesus didn't owe him anything, didn't even have to stop when they called out to him – no one else usually did. But Jesus' love was so great that it transformed this man. It healed his body, but most of all it healed his soul. This was the kind of thanks and praise that can only come from living faith in the true Savior of mankind, and so Jesus affirmed that when he said, "*Rise and go; your faith has made you well.*"

Literally what Jesus said there was, "Your faith has saved you" – it's saved your body from disease and it's saved your soul from sin. But we know that our faith would be nothing without the all-important object of that faith. Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit, created through His Word and Sacraments, that hooks us up to Jesus' power and blessings; it is the channel, the conduit through which the benefits of Jesus' work become ours. Jesus emphasizes here for the Samaritan and for us that the only reason we have both earthly and heavenly blessings is through connection to God and His grace. Like little children completely at the mercy of their gracious and loving father, so we also with total trust hold out our hands to receive any and every good thing from our heavenly Father – and he never fails us. For that, he is worthy of all our thanks and praise!

So friends, this Thanksgiving, let's throw ourselves at Jesus' feet with that Samaritan. When our gracious God blesses our lives from front to back and top to bottom, let's come back here to God's house and praise God in a loud voice. Let's thank our God and Savior with hearts and hands and voices because he has the love and power to give us the solution to all our earthly problems, and he proved that by giving us the Solution to our greatest spiritual Problem of sin when he died for us on the cross and rose again. So let's not just *say* thank-you to God for all his gifts. No, let's actually *be* thankful, because they really are *that* great. Remember who you are in Christ, and remember who you were or would be without him. Yes, to the true and living God who gives us homes, clothes, cars, friends, family, and more toys than we can think of; food to eat, drink to enjoy, work to do, and shelter to keep us alive and well; who gives us our earthly life and breath along with our spiritual life and our heavenly inheritance, to that good and gracious Lord be all our thanks and praise this Thanksgiving and always. Amen.