

Luke 17:11-19  
Thanksgiving Eve

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“Cream colored ponies and crisp apple strudels, door bells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles.

Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings. These are a few of my favorite things.” Some of you might recognize those lines from Rodger's and Hammerstein's musical classic *The Sound of Music*. Maria von Trappe is trying to make the scared kids feel better by listing some of these favorite things – comforting, beautiful, often delicious things that she is thankful to have in her life.

Often when families gather together at Thanksgiving, they take time to mention what they are thankful for individually. The lists might sound something like those favorite things from *The Sound of Music*. People might touch on some of their favorite activities that they participate in. Others are thankful for family members. Some find their hearts warmed by the significant other in their lives. And these are wonderful things! These are blessings that God has put into our earthly lives that we are and should be thankful for. But many times we stop there at the surface, thanking God only for the blessings that our eyes can see, while forgetting the more important ones that we have received.

But as you look at my sermon parts printed in the bulletin, it sounds like I'm speaking out of both sides of my mouth. Has vicar lost his mind? Why in the world would he say “Thanks for nothing” as we gather to celebrate Thanksgiving? When we use that phrase, “thanks for nothing,” we are usually speaking this in a sarcastic tone. “Thanks for nothing” you might spit at the television screen when your least favorite politician is having a press conference. “Thanks for nothing” you might say to the spouse who didn't help you with the dishes or the yard work.

This idea of thanklessness is shown by nine of the ten lepers in today's gospel. Although Jesus had healed them of their disease, those lepers never returned with a simple “thanks.” Look how quickly they figured that they had better things to do than to praise the greatness of the one who had given them exactly what they wanted! How many times in life do we receive what we have longed for, what we have prayed about, and forget the God who gave it to us? So many pray that they'll have a nice home with beautiful kids and a loving wife. And yet as the years go on it's as though they forget both the one who gave the gift and even the great gift itself! We take things for granted so often in our lives, failing to see the blessings and failing to acknowledge with love and gratitude the one who gave. Like the lepers, our eyes so quickly focus on other things that we want and don't have, and then it's “Thanks for nothing, God.”

Here I propose a different attitude behind those words “thanks for nothing.” As we look at our lives through the lens of the account of “The Ten Lepers,” we realize that we can be and *should be* truly quite thankful for nothing! Let's think about it. What was it those lepers wanted of Jesus? They wanted their painful disease removed! They wished to be rid of that stigma of being a leper and the shame which went with it! As they then went on their way, all ten of those lepers realized that Jesus had given them what they wanted. The Samaritan then came back and praised God for what he *didn't* have anymore.

Often when we lose something in our lives, we feel the opposite. Our spouse dies or divorces us, we blame God. We lose our job, we slip into depression. The dear car that has given over two-hundred thousand faithful miles can no longer get me from A to B, my heart feels empty inside. Yet we have also had something taken away from us that we certainly didn't want at all!

See the power that Jesus showed over the disease of the lepers. There was no medicine at the time to heal these sorts of chronic illnesses. They were dead men walking. He showed his authority over that disease – power which only came from God himself – to heal them of that disease completely. Christ has removed from us something much worse than a condition which wastes away our skin and flesh. By his death on the cross, that same Jesus who displayed his power over leprosy now showed his power over sin. It made us the enemies of God whose only fate was inescapable death and hell. But he has removed those from our futures as well. Thanks for nothing, God! Thanks for no sin, death, or hell. Thanks for freeing us from our enslavement.

The lepers could indeed be thankful for what they didn't have anymore! Don't take for granted what our God has removed from us. Even though we so often want only to see what we have in regard to the visible blessings of this earth, the removal of that sin and its consequences is more precious than anything that our eyes can see. Yet let us also remember what we have *received* from our God – the multitudes of blessings, physical and, more importantly, spiritual, which God has given us. For this, we also say, “Thanks for everything!”

Jesus didn't just have the power to take away disease from those lepers. By his hand he showed his ability also to give them everything which they had lost! These men could also now go back to their families! How awful it must have been to say goodbye to wife and kids to go and live in a colony, knowing that you would probably never see their faces again. Now they could kiss their wives and hug their children again. And society! It had shamed them. They had also left that behind with little hope of returning to walk through the streets of their towns and villages. They were in such a miserable state! But Jesus showed compassion to those men. He didn't leave them in their wretched condition.

You and I were in a miserable state as well. Spiritually bankrupt. Children of wrath. No hope ever to dig ourselves out of the crater we'd already dug ourselves into. Sin put us into that condition. But that sin has been taken away from us, washed away by Jesus' blood so that we might have something else in its place! He has the ability to give us everything that we need, and he does with the same generosity that he showed the leper. Instead of rags stained with guilt, we now wear Christ's robes of righteousness as our own! He has taken his holiness before God in heaven, and placed it over our own shoulders. Instead of no hope of salvation, we have the *sure* hope of salvation. Our God has shown us enough love not only to remove hell from our futures, but to make eternal life in heaven our new future!

What else could we possibly need? Absolutely nothing! God has given us all that we need for our spirits by the death and resurrection of his one and only Son. But he doesn't stop there. Our Father abundantly continues to give to his children! Tomorrow we are going to celebrate Thanksgiving. Most will have an opportunity to see your homes filled with family members or celebrate at the home of a friend. Think of the food that you're going to eat – the potatoes and gravy and stuffing and cranberry sauce and turkey. Goodness knows you'll probably find room

after all that to top it off with some sort of pie, probably with a giant melting glob of ice-cream perched atop it. After you eat, the Packers will probably go 11-0. What more could you want?

How can we possibly thank God for all of this? Do we act like the nine lepers who went on their way without a word of gratitude? We make the attitude of that Samaritan our own, the attitude of worship and reverence. We've all taken time out of our Wednesday night to come into his house. We come on Sunday mornings not only to receive food for our souls through the Word and the Spirit, but to give back to him through our prayers and our songs of praise and our attitudes of thanks for all that he's done. And we thank him by "offering [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). We don't end our worship when we walk out of these doors at the end of every service. That's where the worship of our lives really begins! We show our thanks by living in the light of God's commands, showing the world that we are his children. And we thank him by our contentedness in life. By not complaining when we don't have everything that we want or that we *think* we might need. Like Paul spoke of in our epistle reading today, by being content in every circumstance, whether in sickness or in health, understanding that God always does that which is best for his children.

Is there really anything else that our God needs to do for us? He has taken away that which would have destroyed us eternally – our sin and death and hell – and has given us that which secures eternal life in heaven! The same God who healed the lepers is the God who gives us every good thing. "God's only Son on the cross for all sinners, the prize of heaven he's made us all winners. Each day forgiven by the King of Kings – these are a few of my favorite things." Although our eyes cannot physically see such things, remember that they are always there, that they are always yours. Don't take them for granted! Thank God for these blessings, not only tomorrow on Thanksgiving Day, but throughout the whole course of life.