

Thanksgiving Day
11/23/17

One out of 10, 10%. But that is such a small sample size. There was only one. Only one healed leper returned to say thank you to Jesus.

It's Thanksgiving day. And I am happy to see all of you here today thanking our God for everything that he has done for us. The church is an excellent place to do that. We have the set up for it. We planned for this; we have hymns today that are all focused on giving thanks to our God. We have readings from Scripture that are all about being thankful to our God. For the next few minutes, you can probably guess that my sermon is going to be about being grateful to our God. And you are right because Thanksgiving is a part of the Christian life. Christians live thankfully.

Our Gospel lesson this morning is the account of the ten lepers. It is a well-known narrative in the Bible. Jesus and his disciples moved a lot. They went from town to town preaching and teaching the word of God. And one day they are walking to a village with a leper colony outside. Leprosy is this terrible disease that is highly contagious, so if you were a leper, you would have to live in this colony, separated from the rest of the world. Your sickness would quarantine you. So there these lepers are, they are isolated from the rest of the world because they are sick and there is no cure. Almost imprisoned by a disease.

Somehow they hear Jesus is coming. Somehow they know who he is. Word had to be spreading that this guy named Jesus had healed leprosy before, had driven out spirits, he had healed deformities. He was a miracle worker. He was their only chance to get any relief from the sickness that they had. So if Jesus was close enough to hear them, they were going to give him a shout out and see if he would help them.

They see Jesus, and they shout out, "Jesus, Master, Have mercy on us!" And he did. He saw them, and he had mercy. He had pity. He had compassion for them. He wanted to help, and he was able. So he said, "Go show yourself to the priest."

To be welcomed back into society it was the priest who identified contagious skin conditions. He was the one that would make the ruling if you were allowed to live in the society or not. The statement: "Go show yourself to the priest" is Jesus saying I took care of it. It is like someone saying did you make my favorite pie for

Thanksgiving? and then you responding say, "Go check the fridge." You say that with a little twinkle in your eye. It is as good as done in their eyes, but you want them to see for themselves. If that pie isn't in the fridge, that is kind of a jerk move. Don't get my hope up. Just let me know that we don't have that pie.

Jesus isn't getting their hopes up. On their way, they start to realize that Jesus did do for them what they wanted. He did heal them. He had mercy on them. He healed every one of them. That is what he did. All of those sick men knew that they were diseased just a couple of minutes ago, they were cured now. After they went to that Priest, I bet there were a lot more people that were thankful. There might have been children that were overjoyed to be able to hug their fathers again. Or wives that are grateful to have their husband back. Friends that had written these men off as dead were now able to sit with them, eat with them and enjoy their company. Those towns that got to be with those family members must have been thankful for all that had happened. Those men must have been thankful for all that had happened. But only one came back to Jesus to fall at his feet and thanked Jesus.

It isn't because he was the only one that was thankful, it is just that only one returned to Jesus to say thank you.

Everyone is grateful. Today around dinner tables all over this country people are going to be grateful for what they have. They will look at their lives and be thankful for family, or for friends, or for their homes, or for safe travel, they will appreciate those things. And whether or not they know it, everything that they have that is good; it comes from God. He is the who gives to us everything that is good in this world. He sends rain on the righteous and the wicked alike. He blesses believers and unbelievers with family and friends, and material possessions. Everything good comes from God.

The day after Thanksgiving, as you know, is black Friday. And if you are going shopping on Black Friday, it doesn't mean your not thankful for everything God has given you; it could be that you are a good steward of your money and you want to get some great deals. But I bring up black Friday because it is a day that we go out usually look for gifts for people. Part of the enjoyment waking up at four in the morning on Friday and fighting through crowds, and waiting in the incredibly long check out lines, surrounded by overtired and over-caffeinated mobs, is the fact that you are getting something special for someone that you love. And that's a beautiful thing. And a month from now when the wrapping

paper is being torn away from that gift, and you finally get to see the face of the person receiving that gift, it's going to be fun.

So let's say you do that. You scout all the deals on this afternoon, while half the family is in a turkey coma, while the football game is on in the background. You find the perfect deal on the ideal gift for the perfect person. You camp tonight. You bust through the door; you make a b line for that gift. You bring it home. You wrap it up. You put it under the tree whenever that goes up. It's Christmas morning they unwrap the gift and say, "Ooooh, thanks." and then set it down. That's a little bit different than that person saying, "Are you kidding me! No way! Can we use this right now? Will you use this with me?"

Being thankful many times is more than just appreciating what you have. It's also a recognition and participation with the one from whom we received it. The teenager getting the new phone uses it to text mom and dad thank you! The little child getting the game wants to play it with his parents. The husband getting the kitchen gadget uses it to make his wife favorite dish. True thankfulness shows itself in action to the person you are thankful.

That is what the one leper realized. He realized what he had been given. He was given his life back. He was cleansed of this disease, he would be able to go back to his family, his friends, his job, his hobbies, but instead doing all of those things first, he did something that he wasn't able to do before Jesus cleansed him. He came to Jesus and fell at his feet. Before now he was sick, he couldn't go near Jesus. He had to stay at a distance. But now he could. Now he came to Jesus and fell at his feet and thanked him and worshiped him for all that Jesus did for him.

You were cleansed too. None of you that I know of have struggled with leprosy. But we all struggle with sin. And just like leprosy separated those infected from the town where their families were, Our sin separates us from living with God. Different sins for each of us- but that sin does separate you from living at peace with your God. And God knew what we needed most. It's not the iPhone X or a new smoker, or couch, you needed to be cured of your sin. And that wasn't easy for Jesus. If in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was praying "Father if it is your will, please take this cup from me." The father had said, "Alright well here is a plan B, you are going to have to stay up all night one night and then deal with a bunch of grumpy crowds, but if you get there first you get eternal salvation for all people in a black Friday deal." I think Jesus would have jumped at that idea rather than suffering the pains of hell so that you could be saved. 33 years of his

life he lived perfectly for you to get you this gift. For thousands of years, he was working through history, to make sure that everything would be perfect for you. He paid with his life, for you. Because you are that special to him.

And we are thankful for that. We show it not by saying... "O great, thanks, Jesus. I'm just going to set my eternal salvation over here and see what else you got me this year." But we show what he means to us by using this gift that we have been given. There is no separation between you and God anymore. You can walk right up to him and thank him for everything that he has done for you. And that's what we are doing here today. We are here to stand in front of our God and say thank you. Thank you for my family, for my friends, for my employment, for the material possessions that I have, but most of all Lord thank you for taking away my sin so that I am confident that I will be in heaven with you one day.

Jesus reminded the leper of that. He said to him, Go now, your faith has made you well. That is the real gift. The leper was believing that Jesus could help him. That is the real gift that you and I have; it is our faith that believes that Jesus can and has helped us. And now we are thankful. Now we show our thanks by living our lives thankfully. Using a new life to serve him. Using a life free from guilt to free others from that burden. Using a life forgiven to forgive others. Using the patience that God shows us in his love to be patient with others. Using everything that we have often been given and to his glory to say thank you.

Today is a good day to reflect on everything that we are given. And its hard to fake thankfulness. It's a natural thing that comes to us when we realize what we have. SO take some time, in the middle of all the hustle and bustle and family, to just reflect on everything that God has given to you. Forgiveness, Everlasting life, a cure for your sin, on top of everything else. We are thankful. We show that with our lives. God has given us everything, and we appreciate that, not just with a few words, but through our lives.

Amen