

In Nomine Jesu

The One Who is Worthy of Thanks

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Today is the National Day of Thanksgiving. I'm sure many, if not all of you, are looking forward to feasting with your families and friends later today. Our nation in particular has plenty to be thankful about. And we as Christians have even more to be thankful about.

Our reading for today, speaks of how God treats us. It also speaks of how He would like us to respond to that treatment. Our reading begins:

“And it happened in the going into Jerusalem and his passing through the region of Samaria and Galilee. And as He was coming into a certain town ten leprous men met Him, standing at a distance.”¹

In our text for today Jesus is heading to His death. He's going towards Jerusalem. There He will make His triumphal entry, only to be killed days later. As He is traveling and about to enter a town He encounters 10 leprous men. As you likely know, leprosy was a horrendous disease back then. Not only did it physically scar your body, but having it meant that you were cast out from your home and your society. You became outcasts and exiles through no fault of your own.

These men know that they are not supposed to get close to people according to the Law. But they also know that Jesus can cure leprosy. He has done it before. So when they encounter Jesus they stand at a distance and shout their appeal.

And they were calling saying, “Jesus Master, have mercy on us.”²

Now I'm going to read their words in Greek because I want you to hear something that you might not notice otherwise. “Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς” Did one of those words sound familiar? And no I'm not talking about Jesus' name.

¹ Luke 17:11-12

² Luke 17:13

I'm talking about the word ἐλέησον. The leprous men use the title of ἐπιστάτα, or Master, for Jesus. This title carries with it the idea of teaching, however they could just as easily have used the word κυριος or Lord.

In just a few minutes, we will be echoing this cry with our own Kyrie Eleison. "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy." Now an important question to answer is this: What does it mean for the Lord to be merciful? Does it mean that He will look down at us and throw us a few coins? Or does it mean that He will heal us of our disease like He did the lepers? Well let's discover the first place that some version of the word "mercy" shows up in Scripture.

The first place that it shows up in the Bible is, unsurprisingly, in Genesis. Specifically the version of the word is merciful. It might surprise you where it shows up. Rather than showing up at a time which we normally categorize as Gospel, or God's saving work for us, it shows up at a time that we normally associate with Law. It shows up during the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

We hear from Genesis,

*"As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.' But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city."*³

So what is the first explicit example of God's mercy in the Bible? It's of God dragging four people out of literal fire and brimstone. It is of God saving people from punishment. God's mercy is His salvation. It is saving us from fire and brimstone. The Psalmist affirms this when he says, "*Then I called on the name*

³ Genesis 19:15-16

of the Lord: 'O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!' Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful."⁴ God's mercy is saving us from fiery damnation, and delivering our souls from Sheol.

Now coming back to our Gospel text from Luke, these 10 lepers would know this. They would know what they are asking for. They are not just asking to be cleansed from their disease. They are asking for salvation. The foreigner, the Samaritan, would have had the Pentateuch and the Psalms. The Samaritans had the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. So even he would know this.

How does Jesus respond to this request? What does He do?

*And behold He said to them, "Go! Show yourselves to the priests." And it happened in their departing they were cleansed.*⁵

The word here for cleansed can mean both physical, as in cleaning something or curing leprosy, or spiritual, as in the forgiving or washing clean of sin. It is no coincidence that this word is used here instead of the word for being healed. These men were both physically and spiritually cleansed. Their leprosy was cleared, but more than that, their sins were forgiven. Or at least that forgiveness was being offered. Unfortunately, it appears that only one of them actually had the Faith that would take hold of that forgiveness.

*And one from among them, seeing that he had been healed, returned with a great voice glorifying God. And falling on his face at the feet of Him giving thanks to Him, and he was a Samaritan.*⁶

This guy gets it. This guy understands what just happened. He knows that he just had his salvation assured for him; that he was elected by the Son Himself to live with Him forever into eternity.

⁴ Psalm 116:4-5

⁵ Luke 17:14

⁶ Luke 17:15-16

It's his response that led the church to place this as the reading for Thanksgiving. So let's examine that response. First off, let's look at few linguistic things. Once the guy realizes what happened, what does he do? He turns back, he returns. He gives us yet another example of his **repentance**. He shows us his faithfulness.

Then he starts glorifying God, loudly. He wants everyone to know what just happened, and who's responsible for it. He knows that he didn't deserve any of this. His next act though is the most telling of this man's faith.

He falls on his face at the feet of Jesus. This is an act of worship. You don't just prostrate yourself before every guy on the street. This guy knew who Jesus was. And the Samaritan knows that there is only one thing to do at a time like this. He thanks Him.

You see Jesus did not have to save him or us. He did not have to come down here. He didn't have to take on the form of a man, or die in our place. He would have been completely justified to simply push the proverbial reset button on the universe. God did not have any sort of outside force making Him do what He did for us.

This is the difference between when we serve, and when Jesus serves. Our duty is to serve. We owe it to Jesus and to God to serve, and therefore we shouldn't expect to get thanked for doing what we are supposed to do anyways. God however, He deserves to be thanked for all of time. On this National Day of Thanksgiving, remember that Jesus didn't have to do anything for us. But also remember that He did everything for us anyway.

However our reading is not done yet. What does Jesus have to say about all this?

But Jesus asked him saying, “Were there not 10 who had been cleansed, where are the others? Is there none to be found turning back to give glory to God except this foreigner?”

And so we get another Jewish face palm moment. Those other guys didn't get it. They probably understood that their healing had been started. But they thought that they had to go finish it at the Temple. They were still following the faith of the Law, rather than the Faith of Jesus. They thought that they had to go and do something still. They were still relying on their own works.

The Samaritan on the other hand, got it. He knew that everything had already been done for him. He understood that there was nothing else for him to do. So he went back and gave the glory to the Person who deserved it. The conclusion to our reading reveals much about this man.

And He said to him, “Rise up and go, the Faith which is yours, has saved you.”

So many things are happening in this little verse. Let's start with the first word, “Rise up.” This is the word that is used for resurrection. So Jesus is commanding this man to be resurrected. He then commands the man to go. But the word carries more weight to it than just meandering down a street. It's more like continue in the way that you have started.

But Jesus knows that this man couldn't do that by himself, so He explains further. He states, “the Faith which is yours has saved.” The Faith allowed this man to get it. The Faith made him repentant and allowed him to believe in the word of Jesus. The Faith led him back to Jesus in order to glorify Him and worship Him. That Faith is what will allow him to rise up, to be resurrected both then and on the Last Day. That Faith is what will allow him to go on and continue on the way in which he has been started.

That faith is also what allows you to do the same. This man gives us a great example to follow. And whether you know it or not you are about to follow his example. In just a minute we are going to be asking Jesus for exactly the same thing that the Samaritan asked for. Then, a few minutes after that, we are going to be thanking Jesus for exactly the same reason that he was thanking Jesus.

In almost all of our worship services here we thank God. But pay attention when we do it. It comes right after the prayers. I will say, “Let us bless the Lord.” And then we will say, “Thanks be to God.” Did you catch that? When we thank God, we are blessing Him. It’s not every day that mortals like us get to bless the One who made us. Except of course, that it is every day. We get to bless our Lord by thanking Him, and we get to do it every day.

Today is the day that our nation has set aside as a Day of Thanksgiving. On this day, you have done well in that you remembered exactly who it is that you’re supposed to be thanking. You came here, and you showed your faith just as the Samaritan showed his faith. I’m sure many of you would have liked to get a head start on dinner. But instead you came here. You came to worship the God who saved you when He died on the cross in your place. If there were anything to be thankful for, then it is that. And thanks be to God, that He has given you the Faith to know that.

Now may the peace which passes all understanding, and which comes from the Faith which is given to you, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

National Day of Thanksgiving
Psalm 67; Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Philippians 4:6-20; Luke 17:11-19
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Vicar Christopher M. Craig

Soli Deo Gloria