**Luke 17:11-19 November 23, 2022**

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Forrest Gump once said that he and his best friend jenny were always together like “peas and carrots.” What other things do we always see together? Peanut Butter and Jelly? Macaroni and Cheese? For Thanksgiving there’s plenty of combinations: Turkey and Gravy. Mashed potatoes and gravy. Stuffing and Gravy. It seems gravy goes well with just about any of the main dishes of the meal. What about Pumpkin Pie and Whipped Cream? Yes there are so many great combinations. Iconic duos, things that go together like “peas and carrots”, the things that are so joined together that you rarely find one without the other. Like the super hero team of Batman and Robin, they work together and complement each other. We find a similar duo today in our Gospel reading, the reading that shows up every Thanksgiving Day or in our case, Thanksgiving Eve. This duo goes well together, but like Batman and Robin one seems to get all the credit. We are after all celebrating, Thanksgiving. So what seems to get left in the dust? The answer is found in Luke chapter 17.

Jesus enters a village and finds 10 lepers, calling out to him in a loud voice saying “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” He then sends them to the temple to show themselves to the priests. As they are going they are cleansed, and one of them, the least likely you would expect to return and give thanks because he was a Samaritan, a foreigner, falls down at the feet of Jesus’ giving him thanks. Why is this the Gospel for Thanksgiving? It’s right there in verse 16, “And he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.” The Greek word for thanks used here is εὐχαριστῶν. You can hear the word Eucharist in it, another name for the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion. It isn’t hard to find the Biblical evidence of thanksgiving here in Luke’s account.

But before that, this leper when he saw he was healed turned around and did something different. He did something that always seems to go hand in hand with thanksgiving, he in the Greek, δοξάζων What did he do? “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, **praising** God with a loud voice.” First came the praise, then came the thanksgiving. Later Jesus, when speaking to the leper and how he was different than the other 9, makes reference to his reaction to being healed. Now this is no mystery, you just heard the story, and if you are following along in your bulletin you know the answer, but just for a second, without looking, ask yourself which one do you think Jesus makes reference to? The man’s praise, or the man’s thanks? Now it’s silly for me to even ask this, it was just read in our Gospel lesson, but do you remember? Jesus says, “Was no one found to return and give δόξαν **praise** to God except this foreigner?”

So Jesus recognizes the praise over the thanksgiving. At least we could say so in this particular instance. So could we rename this day to Praise Day? That sounds pretty silly. Could it be thought of as a day of Praise and Thanksgiving? Perhaps that’s more in line with the Biblical observance of this day. Thanksgiving isn’t really seen as much of a theological holiday in comparison to the high festival days of the Church Year. This is more of a secular observance that we come worship with together with our families. We give thanks to God, but it doesn’t really hold the same weight as Biblical holidays with a solid Biblical foundation. Christmas – the day Christ was born. Easter – the day Christ rose from the dead.

Now you may be thinking after this long drawn out examination of the leper’s response, Pastor who cares? What does it matter if he praised and gave thanks, they are the same thing! Well, let’s look at the definitions. Praise, is defined as “to express warm approval or admiration of.” Thanks is defined as “an expression of gratitude”. Are they that different? Not necessarily, but both have something very important in common, which makes praise and thanks like “peas and carrots”. They are an iconic theological duo.

What is our closing hymn for tonight? Have you checked? It’s the hymn “Praise and Thanksgiving” there we have even a musical example of this iconic duo, and how they go together. Something interesting about this hymn was that it wasn’t listed in the section of hymns that are associated with praise. Even though it has praise in the title. That may seem kind of strange, and to be fair the very next hymn starts the praise section. So it almost made it. But the category of this hymn is stewardship, and that’s where the true lesson of these two words and what makes them significant comes from. Because we will sing these words. “Praise and Thanksgiving, Father we offer.” That’s the connection. Praise and Thanksgiving are meaningless without a subject to direct them to. Praise has at it’s root an approval of what someone else has done, you come to them to praise them for their actions. You praise them for their power, you praise them for their mighty deed. Thanks is an expression of gratitude that has to have a subject as well. Thanks speaks to a specific action that was done that you no doubt benefited from. Praise is defined as approval and recognition, thanks as gratitude. They are similar, yet different.

We live in a world of praise and thanks, but not to a specific subject, and not the same subject. We live in a world of praise for the universe, offering up praise to the creation rather than the creator. We live in a world of self praise, where we approve of ourselves and magnify or glorify our own work. We live in a world of praise for others and their own finite intellect and work, while we neglect the work of the true creator and the source of all power and intellect in the first place.

We live in a world of baseless praise. We live in a world without a subject to direct their praise to. We live in a world where everyone gives thanks, but no one defines to whom. We come together to give thanks for our things, for our family, for our lives, for our gifts, for our job, and so on, but we don’t name the one who does the giving. The lepers can’t plead ignorance for their healing, they are without excuse. Jesus himself calls out their thanklessness. “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?” It’s true he tells them to go to the temple, but only the Samaritan recognizes the source of the healing to turn around and give praise, then thanks.

This is important for us to recognize in our lives, because without praise, an approval of what God has done, there cannot be a true expression of gratitude in our works of thanks. We come to God’s house to give *Him* praise. Not to praise ourselves. Not to raise our own level of spirituality in some kind of nebulous or undefined praise of a nebulous or undefined little g god. We don’t just praise the spirit and power of some unknown thing to make ourselves feel better, any praise that we do is in recognition of what God has already done. We praise his mighty and all powerful attributes, his knowledge, his presence, we praise him, we do not praise ourselves for coming. This is a house of worship to God, not ourselves.

And we give thanks to God, on Thanksgiving, by being here in the first place, to praise him and then go out and thank him in what we do, in what we say, in how we treat others, in what we do for others as a means of expressing our gratitude for what he has already done. Both praise and thanks have to be rooted in the work of God. Our thanksgiving is focused on God our Father, the one who gives us everything. “Praise and Thanksgiving” our closing hymn lists off a bunch of items that we attribute to God’s providing hand of harvest, which is a key theme of Thanksgiving the holiday as we celebrate it at this time of year. “Harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard, and on and on.” Who is the Lord of Harvest? God is. Who produces the fruits of the orchard? God does. So who is the prime figure of Thanksgiving? Does the Macy’s Day parade begin with Jesus riding in and waving to those gathered? No…so who do we see as the mascot of this holiday? The turkey? The Pilgrims and Indians shaking hands? The horn of harvest with the fruits and the grain? Is the harvest itself the whole point of Thanksgiving? No. God is. He is the giver. He is the source of the thanks.

A tradition that hasn’t gone out of style yet, although it may be losing popularity is that after a huge milestone in your life you sit down and hand write thank you cards for gifts that you receive. You specifically name the person and the gift and tell them thank you. Well that is the best way to understand the thanks that we give in our lives. If you found 20 dollars on the street, you wouldn’t be able to write a thank you card for this gift, you wouldn’t know specifically who lost it or if they even meant to give it to you. You would have to thank God for it, and that’s the whole point. All gifts come from God.

Your hand written thank you to God the Father, for the gift of God the Son, who came not just to heal lepers but to die on the cross to take away your sin, and who rose again to destroy death and give to you eternal life through the faith created in your heart by God the Holy Spirit, is your actions. Your thoughts. What you actually do and how you think and how your faith changes you. We give thanks through the fruits of our faith. And our faith is strengthened here in God’s house of praise. The two are connected, they go together, they remain the focus of our lives as Christians in that they are linked to Our Triune God in His work in our lives.

You don’t have to change this holiday on your calendars to “Praise and Thanksgiving” Day. Thanksgiving can have the spotlight, I don’t think praise will mind. But at least just for tonight, see how the two are as connected as “peas and carrots” Turkey and Stuffing, potatoes and gravy and pumpkin pie and whipped cream. How they go together. And finally, go forth from this time of praise to a time of Thanksgiving, not just with the food, or the shopping, or the football games, but with the fruits of faith in our expression of true Thanksgiving to God with praise for all that He has already done for us.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.