**Luke 17:11-19 11/24/21 (Thanksgiving Eve Service)**

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A tradition in my mother’s side of the family was that on Thanksgiving Day we would all gather together, stand in a large circle, and tell everyone what we were thankful for. Perhaps you share in this tradition as well. You will probably see professional athletes, celebrities, sportscasters, members of the military, probably even the President sharing what they are most thankful for during the Lions game, or the Macy’s day parade tomorrow on Thanksgiving Day. You’ll hear all the usual answers, being thankful for family, friends, food, drink, their house and home, their safety in this country thanks to the military, and other serious topics as well as children being thankful for their phones, their friends, perhaps a favorite video game they love, or a dessert like pumpkin pie. But in a way, as great and wonderful as this tradition is to focus on this day as being one of thanks, do we neglect the giver? Do we focus on the particular items without recognizing how they were obtained? Tomorrow I guarantee that everywhere you look you will see people giving thanks, and you will get the answer to “what” they are thankful for, but I doubt you’ll always get the answer of “who”. Who are they thankful to? Who receives their thanks for the wonderful gifts they have received? Who gave them all the things they have, in the first place?

That’s really what thanksgiving comes down to in our lives as Christians; what are we thankful for? And who do we give thanks to? While the answer seems very straightforward, it’s more than just simply saying “thanks” to God for all that we have. While the who is easy for us to identify, we are constantly pushed to see ourselves as the recipient of the thanks and praise. For even an unbeliever can give thanks, but the thanks rises up into the air to no one. Someone who is self-centered will give thanks every day of the year, but it will always be centered on themselves. It’s a meaningless gesture, to just give thanks, screaming out into the world that you are thankful for what you have, without attaching it or attributing it to someone or something. Which is why when we really trace down where the thanks comes from, we have to come to the root of where everything came from in the first place. The who is identified in our lives as the originator of all that is around us, from food, drink, house, home, wife, children, land, animals, clothing, shoes, and so on as Luther puts it in the 1st article and when he speaks of Daily Bread. We as Christians focus all of our thanks and praise for everything we have even the staples of any Thanksgiving Day meal; the turkey, the potatoes, and the stuffing back to its proper source, which is God. The creator, and sustainer of all things, even our bodies, our souls, our eyes, ears, and all our members. We know that all we have comes from Him. As Paul writes in Philippians. “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To **Our God** **and Father** be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Even the lepers recognized and called out to God in our Gospel lesson from Luke for mercy, knowing that Jesus could give some sort of help for their condition. But the lepers are an example of missing the point of the “what” when it comes to our thanks. When you’re put on the spot in your family, or even when you just stop to think for a moment by yourself, really ask yourself what are you thankful for? What sorts of things come to your mind? Family? Friends? Co-workers? A good return on your investments? Your good health? Or any other positive and wonderful thing that is happening and that you are experiencing in your life? That is the usual response, to give thanks to the Lord for all the wonderful things that are going on in our lives and in the lives of those around us. So…what about the members of your family that you are feuding with, or not getting along with, or are nothing but a headache for you in your daily life? Or the friend that disagrees with you and that you have stopped talking to? Or the co-worker who is constantly challenging you and making life harder each and every day? What about the year when your investments lost money and didn’t perform very well? What if your health isn’t good or actually is failing? What if this could very well be your last Thanksgiving? Do we give thanks for these things? Do we praise God’s name in the times in our lives when we are faced with hard times and struggles, when we don’t sit down before a giant feast of turkey, potatoes, and stuffing, and instead eat a meager meal because that’s all we have?

Thanksgiving all comes down to “what” we are thankful for and the “Who” that receives the thanks. Here in our Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy the people are reminded and told to remember that God humbled them in the wilderness, to test their hearts. That he was the one who was responsible for them being hungry, and for being fed. That he was the one who was disciplining them so that they understood that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. It was an important lesson for them because they had witnessed God’s power first hand in the work that was done to save them from slavery in Egypt. Yet they fell into grumbling and complaining, their faith grew weak, even though they were God’s chosen people. They had to be reminded that their food came from God, but so did their hunger, and their wandering. And yet they are told to remember the hard times because even that was a gift from God to keep their hearts and minds focused on the source of their salvation.

Paul gives us the same lesson in Philippians by explaining how he has learned to be content in all circumstances. That now he knows how to be brought low and how to abound. And how in any and every circumstance, even the times he’s hungry or fed, when he faces abundance or need, to remember that in everything the Lord is with Him. Even the story of the 10 lepers, where we see 1 leper out of 10 who were cleansed and healed by Jesus return to give thanks, even here we see that any of the 10 lepers could in the moment they are afflicted with the leprosy, give thanks to God for not just the healing, but also the disease which pointed them to the source of all healing. For while all 10 of them were cleansed that day, their true need was met by Christ when he went to the cross to die for their sins. The leprosy that affected their bodies destroyed their relationship with their families and their communities, but their sin destroyed their relationship with God the Father. Left in that sin they were headed for an eternal destruction, not just an earthly isolation. Which is why Jesus points to the lepers faith, the Holy Spirit working in his life, as the source of the healing, for by faith that leper would receive the forgiveness that Jesus earned on the cross by dying in his place.

The proper understanding of our thanks to God is shown in the work of Christ, in examples in the Old and New Testament, and best summed up in the words of 1 Thessalonians 5 – “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s Will for you in Christ Jesus”. The life of a Christian is one of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving, because the life of a Christian is a hard one. It is filled with persecution and hate. It is a life that is lived in a constant state of temptation, where we will give in to sin and come to God’s house to confess those sins and receive forgiveness. To ignore the bad and only focus on the good can be easy to do for one day, but it misses the big picture of all that Christ is doing for us and working in us. For in God’s Holy Will your life is directed. He is watching over you and providing for what you need at all times, whether it’s abundance or need. Which leads us to rejoice even in our sufferings and hardships. Which causes us to stand out and be different from the rest of the world that despairs when they receive bad news or when something devastating happens in their lives. We have no need to fear the loss of this life because eternal life is waiting for us. And that is worth rejoicing over, that is worth praying about and thanking God for daily, continuously, and always.

Our salvation is always at the source of our thanksgiving, because without it the turkey, the potatoes, the house, the boat, the camper and everything else would be meaningless. Without Christ all of creation would live in constant despair, because there would be no hope. So it is for those who have fallen away from the faith and who live in rejection of God’s gifts. Which is what makes our thanksgiving so great on a day like today. Because we remember the life we have in Christ. Because we rejoice in the faith in our hearts that was created by the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism. And while we join together to pray for those who are against God and His Church, we also go to them, tell them the truth, and enlighten their lives with God’s Word and Promise. That Jesus loved them enough to die for their sins and save them from their unrighteousness. Or as Jude put it on Sunday, that the Holy Spirit would use us to snatch them out of the fire.

As you gather together with friends and family I pray that your Thanksgiving Day would be one of joy, fellowship, and fun. That all of the thanksgiving that we offer to God together tonight, tomorrow, and all the days to come this coming Advent and Christmas season and the years to come would be rooted and focused on the giver of all good things. That we would thank God for all things that come into our lives, as we understand them as means of strengthening our faith and focusing us on the cross of Jesus Christ. For by the Will of the Father, sending His Son to die, we see His love, which leads us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks.

Amen.

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

Amen.