

Luke 17:11-19 Three Dimensional Thanksgiving

October 9, 2016

A talk show host this morning was talking about the state of your in-box. For those who are digitally challenged, an inbox is where all your email goes. One person on the show had unopened and unread messages numbering in the thousands. Hundreds come in every day and there aren't enough hours in the day to even look at them all. Do you get so many emails that you simply flush it every few days or do you save them all? Do you ever think about what you might have missed among all those un-read messages? I got one last week from Nigeria that promised a share in 85 million dollars that the widow of the now dead Minister of Finance wants my help to smuggle out of the country. I just have to send her the login and password for my bank account and half of all that money will be mine. Just imagine the blessings!

As we set aside this time of thanksgiving to give praise to God for His blessings, how much real thought have you given to all the blessings that God has showered upon you? You may look around at what other people have and conclude that you have been hard done by, but most of us have been blessed in ways that nine-tenths of the world can't even imagine

How does Martin Luther put it in his explanation of the first article of the Apostles' Creed?

He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses and still preserves them. Also clothing and shoes, food and drink, wife and children, land, animals, and all that I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

Why does He do that? *All of this out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.*

In our text today ten men were about to be blessed in ways beyond their wildest dreams, far more than they could ask or imagine. Leprosy was a terrible disease that robbed its victims of everything. It took away home and family. It stripped you of your friends and your job. It robbed you of health and vitality. It stole all the good things in life. It just didn't let you die. Can you close your eyes and imagine the pitiable cry that came to Jesus' ears that day? The groaning and the sighing. Have pity on us. The tears and the outstretched arms. Please, please help us. They didn't even ask for healing, just a bit of mercy. Some new rags to replace their old rags. A few coins, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee.

And Jesus responded beyond their wildest dreams. In an instant they would receive back all the things they had lost, all the things they didn't have before, home, family, friends, job, health, vitality, all the good things of life. One of them, when he saw what was happening to him, stopped dead in his tracks, turned around and ran back. He fell at Jesus' feet and thanked Him. Just one came back, only one, only this foreigner. Where are the other nine? Where did they go? Ask yourself, "Is that question from Jesus' lips the voice of anger or the voice of sadness?" Where are the other nine? Is Jesus angry? Is he sad? Is He disappointed?

Think about this question: Why did Jesus come? Why did He set aside the glory of heaven to take on our human nature and suffer and die on a cross? He says: I have come to seek and to save that which was lost. When He saw the crowds He had compassion on them because they were wounded and bleeding, like sheep without a shepherd. Just a few days before His crucifixion He cried out loud, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.*" Time and again Jesus hurt and wept for those who were left out.

It didn't hurt His feelings that the nine were ungrateful. He wasn't going to report them to Emily Post or write to Dear Abby. He hurt, but not for himself. He hurt for them. His heart was heavy because He had even more gifts to bestow on them, but the nine would end up missing out on something far greater than the healing they had received.

“Where are the other nine?” is a cry of lament because these nine who had been so wondrously exposed to the kingdom would end up being left out. They could have had so much more but now they would miss it. Where are the other nine?

Sometimes it’s a Sunday school teacher’s question when half the class is absent on a sunny Sunday morning. Sometimes it’s a pastor’s question when he has prepared a sermon or worked on materials for a new members’ class. All these people had said they wanted to come. Then, like at the wedding banquet, when everything was ready, they all alike began to make excuses. Don’t they understand what they are missing? They are missing an opportunity for spiritual blessing. An opportunity to grow in the Word and in faith. An opportunity for a life-changing relationship with their Saviour.

All too often we grab the little gifts God gives and run with them, only to miss the greater gifts. Here’s the first lesson you need to learn on this day of thanksgiving: if you limit your vision and your giving of thanks to physical things, you may well have a good life, but that life will be a two dimensional life. The nine went back home to a wonderful but two dimensional life. One came back to Jesus and his life was changed forever.

There is a danger out there. Don’t get stuck in the physical, material world. Don’t get too in love with things. Don’t limit your life to two dimensions. All those physical and material blessings that you receive by God’s grace without any merit or worthiness in you. Do you know why God does that? He does not do it so that you can be fully self-sufficient in a life without Him. Scripture says that God’s goodness is intended to lead you to repentance so that you might have life forever with Him! God’s goodness is intended to bring your life into a whole new dimension, a life of enduring relationship with Him. That’s what Jesus was talking about when He said: “I have come that they may have life, life to the full.”

The one who returned to give thanks to Jesus, received a second blessing that the others remained sadly unaware of. What can we say about the other nine? Perhaps they thought that life is best lived not too close to God. Many people are willing to settle for only a little bit of religion. They are afraid that getting too much is bad for you. They don’t realize what they are missing. Young parents bring a child for baptism. A young couple plans a church wedding. They have lots of good intentions but they fade away soon after. In the busyness of life, they take their eyes off Jesus and lose sight of the spiritual blessings He has in store for them

On His way to Jerusalem one day, Jesus was passing through Jericho. A blind man called out to Him, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

“Go,” said Jesus, “Your faith has healed you.”

Then, when he received his sight, guess what he did. He got up and followed Jesus.

What sweet words, *he got up and followed Jesus*. Whatever life he might have gone back to paled in comparison to his new life and his new direction. You see, faith isn’t simply believing stuff about God. Faith is following after. Faith is relationship. Faith brings a new purpose for living and a new dimension to life. That day Jesus was travelling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. He was on the way to the cross, but He was taking the long way. He wanted to minister to as many people as possible along the way.

In Luke 9:51, Jesus had already set His sights on the cross. As you read on in Luke, everything He did from then on is planned to get Him to Jerusalem, but also to stop along the way to gather and to bring as many lost sheep with Him as He could. So, as Jesus travels to Jerusalem, the number of those following Him grows one by one, two at a time, three at a time. By the time of the resurrection, Acts 1 tells us that the number of believers had grown to about 120. While we might identify some of them, most are nameless. Who was there besides the twelve? There were the women who had followed Jesus, Peter’s mother-in-law, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary and Martha. There was Bartimaeus, the blind man in Jericho. Maybe Zacchaeus whose life was forever changed. The bride and

groom from the almost spoiled wedding at Cana. They had invited Jesus to their marriage and He had blessed it beyond their dreams. Jairus and his daughter, the widow from Nain and her son, the man born blind, the Canaanite woman and her daughter, Lazarus. If you add up all the people Jesus healed and helped, everyone He raised from the dead, all those freed from demons, and everyone from the miracles we know of, you get about half that number. These 120 believers had not only received help, healing, and rescue, they found a new dimension to life. They found what Jesus came to bring, forgiveness, life and salvation.

Beloved, what I want you to see here is the nature of the grace of God. If I were God those other nine would have gotten un-healed. Revenge is best served cold, when it is least expected. If I were God, those nine would have gotten what they deserved. I would have made them sick again. But Jesus continued to show His great love for them. He did not condemn the ungrateful. He didn't take back their healing when they did not return to thank Him. They probably stayed healed for life but Jesus hurt for them. In the grand scheme of things, they had received a small blessing but missed the big one. About the nine lepers who were cleansed but didn't come back: they got cleansed and healed but -they missed the real prize, Jesus himself. They missed forgiveness, life and salvation. They missed the kingdom of God. They missed eternity.

Beloved, you have experienced the loving, healing touch of Jesus. He loves you so much that He deliberately made the effort to come to you. He left behind His heavenly home and humbled himself to become one of us. His purpose was to take your place on the cross. He went there willingly, taking the punishment you deserved because of your sins. He allowed himself to be placed outside of God's love, abandoned by His Father as He hung on the cross. He has cleansed us of our sin. We can now stand before God as clean and pure because of the blood of Jesus. Nothing will ever separate us from His love.

Yet we face a real temptation and a real danger. We can take God's blessings for granted. We can take them and run. We get what we want from the Lord and go our own way. We can put Him on the back burner. We can ignore the privilege of prayer. There is a hymn that says, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear." Why? Because we neglect the spiritual dimension. We focus on the physical. We neglect His means of grace. We don't live by His power but try and survive on our own strength. We rush through life, not taking time to just be with Him. We can move away from Him. Oh, we look for Him when a crisis arises but we suffer unnecessarily as a result. Others around us suffer. The mission of the church to a lost and fallen world suffers.

A life of praise and thanksgiving is the response of faith to the grace of God. It is the song of the heart in response to the melody of the Gospel. It is the echo and the amen to all that God has done for us in Christ. It is a blessed relationship with your Saviour and Redeemer. It is living with Him and under Him in a life of praise for all that He has done for us.