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Hope Lutheran Church

Thanksgiving, 2017

Grace, Marcy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Happy Thanksgiving! It is truly another beautiful day in God's creation as we remember all of the things that God has given us. This morning's text is the Gospel reading, the story of the Ten Lepers... This morning, though, I want us to walk through this text together. The scene is set, imagine Jesus is traveling with his disciples, just north of the Dead sea, its hot, they are walking heading towards Jerusalem.

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

So, once again Jesus is traveling and someone notices him, and cries out to him to help them. But this time, it is not only one person, it is a group of ten lepers, all brought together by their unfortunate illness, exiled from society. Their initial crying out, in itself is an act of faith, knowing that Jesus is someone that can heal them. They have most likely heard about him, and all of the miracles he has done. So they see this man named Jesus and they decide to call out to him.

When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

What a turn of events for these ten lepers. They go from societal outcast, unable to live amongst their own community because of illness, to now being able to walk up into the temple and appear before the priest. Something they have not been allowed to do for some time because of the purity laws. They are able to go back to their families, back to their jobs, back to their lives. This is truly a life altering moment for all ten of them, having been plagued with such an awful disease, and being casted out of their society. It brings them back into the fold, back into their community. He has restored them, and cleansed them so that they can go back and go before God in the temple.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Only one of them came back to give thanks to Jesus for healing them. Only one. While, we can't say that the other nine weren't thankful, because they most certainly were, they had just been healed from this awful disease. They were not necessarily doing something wrong, they were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do, so they went to the temple. They were doing what they had to do to get back into their community, back to their family.

But, something about the faith of this Samaritan leper, led him back to Jesus. He turns around after seeing he was healed he begins praising God, and then he falls at the feet of Jesus. We cannot say for certain why this one leper came back to thank Jesus, we cannot say he knew

that Jesus was God explicitly... But it appears he recognized that this miracle of God was worked through this man named Jesus... This man knew somehow, that Jesus was responsible for this healing, and praised God, and whether he knew it or not, he fell at the feet of God in the flesh... Before going to the temple, he took a few moments to stop and give thanks.

This story reminds me of something similar, at least for myself. After Kara and I got married, we had all of these gifts that had been given to us by generous people, some that we didn't even know all that well. Now, some of you might be like me, I do not like writing thank you notes, and it is not because I am not thankful, but more because I just do not like to take the time. But, I know that it is the courteous thing to do. It is the right thing to do. But I despise it, I can't stand it. Kara had to twist my arm to get me to do it. So, one day, we sat down, and we took an hour or two and we cranked out our thank you cards and sent them off. It only took us an hour or two... But, yet, I fought doing something that only took an hour or two because I simply did not want to give it my time. I had other things to do that I perceived to be more important.

It didn't take the Samaritan much time to turn around and thank Jesus either, he didn't devote his life to following him. He didn't become one of his disciples as far as we know. But, before going to the temple as Jesus had said, he took a few moments out of his life to turn around and thank him for healing him.

All too often I find myself just like the 9 lepers who kept walking... And I think we can all relate to this one way or another... Living in a world that is fast paced, quickly moving, one where we live entitled lives. We work hard to make a living, by using our gifts and talents. We

live in a merit based society that rewards those who get the best grades, or have a piece of paper that gives us some sense of worth. We value our lives based on accomplishments we have achieved. Everything is about us, everything inside of us wants to pat ourselves on the back. We want to tell ourselves “good job.” Our sinfulness, wants it to be all about us and what we have done.

But Jesus... Jesus was delighted at the Samaritan who stopped for just a moment, to give praise to God and fall at his feet. And Jesus delights when we stop for a moment and we fall at his feet as well. Jesus deserves our thanksgiving, because it is Jesus who went to the cross for us. It is Jesus that cleansed us of our sin, it is Jesus who strengthens our faith, it is Jesus who has taken our burdens upon himself. It is Jesus who has swallowed up death forever. This is the reason we come to church every single Sunday... To come, and sing praises to God, to come and kneel at the foot of his cross where we receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, and where we respond with praise and thanksgiving.

But, this begs the question what about Monday... Tuesday... Wednesday, and all the other days in the week. Are we taking a few moments to give thanks to God? Are we giving a couple of minutes to just be still? If you are like me I know that I often forget. Or maybe something gets in the way. We don't make time. Maybe it's just wanting to sleep in on a Sunday, or catch up on work. Or it's a sporting event. Or it's as simple as we just don't feel like it. Or sometimes we might just forget... Maybe we are even in church, but were forced to be here. Maybe we are in church, but are distracted. Or are just going through the motions.

We give thanks to God not just by attending church on Sunday... but by using our gifts and talents he has given us to serve him. We use them to spread his message of love and forgiveness. We give thanks to God by using the gifts he has given us to serve Him. Sometimes it is simply a moment spent in His word, or saying a prayer of thanksgiving... Acknowledging who has given us all we have.

So as we celebrate this Thanksgiving Day, and focus on all we have been blessed with, I encourage us all to live lives of thanksgiving. To take a few moments every day to just say thanks, not to earn God's grace and favor, but to rightfully respond to it. Let's be intentional about giving thanks. To keep our hearts and minds focused on Christ who has died for us, who has been raised from the dead, who has forgiven us, and who has saved us. Thanks be to God, for all he has given us, and for sending his son Jesus to die for us. Amen.