

It is right, and a good and joyful thing
Thanksgiving Sunday, Luke 17:11-19
Grace Church Newton
November 19, 2023

THIS IS A DRAFT TEXT OF THE HOMILY. IT MAY VARY FROM THE PRESENTED VERSION. PLEASE EXCUSE TYPOS AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS, AND DO NOT CITE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God. Amen.

It was hard for me to get started preparing this sermon. It was hard to write because as we head into this Thanksgiving week, I am intensely aware that it's hard to put one set of words around this moment. Each of us will experience this holiday – and the coming Christmas season – in very different ways. For some of us, this Thanksgiving will be a joyful, celebratory, laughter-filled occasion. We might be anticipating and preparing a big table full of food and drink surrounded by family and loved ones. For others among us, relationships around the table may be fraught, lessening the glow of the gathering. And perhaps for others, Thanksgiving may be a smaller affair. Family and friends may be farther away, geographically or relationally. The table may be set for few.

And yet, to all of us I say, “Happy Thanksgiving!” For “It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth.”

Finding words is hard because, while some of us may be in a season of well-being, others may be experiencing hardship. You may have lost a job, you may be facing illness, this may be a first holiday season after losing a spouse or loved one. Or you may be the one primarily tasked with creating a holiday, and it may feel like one more thing on top of all the other things on your plate (so to speak).

And yet, to all of us I say, “Happy Thanksgiving!” For “It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks...”

Finding words is hard because we are living through a distressing time with war and violence ever-present and measured dialogue ever more difficult to find. Even Thanksgiving itself can be problematic if we gloss over the troubling history of European settlers driving the original inhabitants from this land.

And yet, to all of us I say, “Happy Thanksgiving!”

It won't surprise you that today's gospel has something to say about giving thanks. This selection from Luke relates a story of Jesus making his way between Samaria and Galilee, continuing his journey toward Jerusalem, when he comes across a group of men with leprosy, ten of them. They keep their distance, shouting to Jesus from afar: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Jesus tells the ten to “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” This response mirrors a scene earlier in the gospel of Luke when Jesus heals a man with leprosy and sends him to the temple for ritual cleansing. But this time, Jesus doesn't announce a cleaning straightaway. He doesn't proclaim their healing out loud. In the moment, he simply says, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” But as they walked away, we are told, “They were made clean.”

But then one of them turned back toward Jesus. We don't know if the others were aware they had been cleansed. Maybe, maybe not. We don't know. We do know that only one turned back. He lay down on the ground at Jesus' feet...and thanked him. To which Jesus replied, “Get up. Go. Your faith has made you well.”

We are told that this man, alone among the ten, was more than cleansed. In our translation Jesus says to the man, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” This phrase in other translations reads: “your faith has *saved* you,” or in the King James Version, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (KJV). This man, alone among the ten, “turned back” to Jesus and gave thanks. And he is more than physically healed. He is healed in body and spirit. He is made whole.

The fact that the man was a Samaritan does carry meaning and symbolic importance which we could explore for quite some time. But the central point for me – in this week as we approach our national day of Thanksgiving – is not the man's ethnic or national identity. The important thing is his response to Jesus and Jesus' response to him. The man said, “Thank you.” Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you, has made you whole.” One commentator interprets Jesus' response this way: “...by Jesus' definition, faith and gratitude are very closely related, [that] faith without gratitude is not faith at all, and [that] there is something life giving about gratitude.” In other words, “the basic Christian response to God is gratitude,” giving thanks [[Source](#), 169].

When we gather in gratitude, we are here not only to take a little nourishment home for the week ahead, but we come to offer thanks and praise to God. When we gather in gratitude, in the words of one author, “Stewardship is transformed from fundraising to the glad gratitude of joyful givers. The mission of the church changes from ethical duty to the work

of grateful hands and hearts. [And] prayer includes not only our intercessions and supplications, but also our thanksgivings at the table” [\[Source 168\]](#).

And so I say to all of us I say, “Happy Thanksgiving!”

As you gather around the table on Thursday – and every day – whether it’s large or small, placid or chaotic, joyful or raucous or more somber, imagine that you are taking your place at God’s Eucharistic table. (Eucharist, by the way, means thanksgiving...). As you pull your chair to the table, may it remind you that we are all connected in the body of Christ. And that, just as we begin the Eucharistic prayer each week, “it is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth.”

Lift up your hearts...

And let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Amen.