Thanksgiving Sunday /

**“Three Kinds of Gratitude”**

Luke 17:11-19 / November 21, 2021

On the way, Jesus met ten lepers. Lepers usually lived in groups designated by the authorities and had to move together in groups when moving. If people approached them without knowing it, they had to shout, ‘we’re unclean, we’re unclean’ in order to keep people from approaching them. How miserable their lives were?

However, in today’s text, we see behaviors that are different from those of lepers in general. As Jesus and his disciples were passing by, the lepers who should have shouted not to come near them called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us! Perhaps they too had heard rumors that a man named Jesus had mystical powers of healing. When the man whom they had heard rumors of passed by them, they broke the rules they had to follow and shouted for him look over them.

When Jesus saw them, he told them to go and show themselves to the priests right away. This was a bit strange. The reason they would go to the priests to show themselves, was to receive confirmation when they were cleansed. If the priest did not confirm and declare cleanliness, even if they were actually healed, they could not return to a normal life. When Jesus said to go to the priest and show themselves, even though they were not yet healed, he was presupposing that they were already healed.

The lepers were bewildered, but as Jesus had directed them, they went to the priest. But something amazing happened. On the way their leprosy was cleansed. They would have been so amazed, as they would not have been able to believe what had happened to them. They would have jumped and screamed in delight. They would have been happy enough to lose their temper. However, only one out of ten came back to Jesus and gave thanks. What happened to the rest of them? Let’s take a look.

**Selfish Gratitude**

Recovering from leprosy was like dying and coming back to life. We can fully predict how good they must have felt. But if you think about it, ironically, we often fail in gratitude when something we longed for has come true. Because we are so overwhelmed by the good results that we lose sight of the One who allowed them. At this time, we usually fail to take care of others, and we overstate our selfish gratitude.

The scene of selfish gratitude is often seen in sporting events. After winning a game, some players kneel and offer a prayer giving thanks to God. Of course, they would be happy to have won and they could thank God, but what about the opposing team? Even among the players of the opposing team or the cheering fans, there must be believers. Are they forsaken by God? When the good results given to us are not good for others, we need to be considerate of others and refrain from selfish gratitude.

These are examples of selfish gratitude; thank God I am alive, while a neighbor died due to the Covid-19; thank God my home wasn’t destroyed, while the tornado destroyed all the houses in a town; thank God for letting me miss the plane, while the plane crashed in an accident and all passengers died. Of course, we naturally feel grateful when something like that happens, but we need to be careful when expressing gratitude in this case. Rather than expressing gratitude to others, we should quietly confess our gratitude to God only and think about what we can do for our neighbors who are in trouble.

There is a person who is now in prison for committing corruption as a close aide to the former president of South Korea. It is known that she was grateful for blessings given to her by God and made many thanksgiving offerings to her church. Also, she testified in several churches that she prayed to become a great person, and God had made her a great one. However, while extorting money from some large companies and habitually not paying small subcontractors, she was a con artist who committed numerous illegalities. What should we think of her thanksgiving?

How different would our gratitude be from those examples? Giving thanks for winning the competition with others, giving thanks for not dying even though others died, giving thanks for eating delicious food that others can’t eat, giving thanks for being successful, regardless of others… Are these kinds of gratitude really okay? We need to reflect on our gratitude. Our gratitude needs to mature more. We need to learn to be grateful while being considerate of those who do not enjoy what we enjoy.

**Proudful Gratitude**

Let’s consider a slightly different aspect now. Among the nine who did not give thanks to Jesus, there must have been some who thought, ‘I received this blessing because I deserved it.’ If you look at the text, Jesus did not come by himself, but because of their earnest shouting, Jesus came to them. If they hadn't shouted so hard, they wouldn't have achieved that. The results they achieved were due to their hard work and efforts. We are so egocentric that it is easy to think that even with such small efforts, ‘this is because of my efforts and merits.’

We don’t feel grateful for what we are paying for. We rather take it for granted. But when it is given freely without paying a price, we feel grateful. However, modern people hate to be given things for free, and they tend to think that it is wrong to be indebted to or to be helped by others. So they like to keep track of what is given and taken. But the less free ‘give and take,’ the harder the world is. Because there isn't much room for gratitude.

The hallmark of the age when gratitude has disappeared is that people do not depend on each other and do not want to be helped. When people receive a favor from someone, they repay the favor as if they were paying off a debt, and then liquidate their gratitude. So there is no room for grace and gratitude to remain in people's lives and souls. All that remains is the gratitude that has been paid off and the gratitude that has been earned proudly with efforts and merits.

We often take what we enjoy for granted, but in reality nothing is taken for granted. Think about my family, children, friend, job, possessions, knowledge, talent, and health. Are these really things to take for granted? There is nothing that can be said to have been achieved by my own effort alone. We have made only a very small contribution to enjoy this. Where did my breath, health, life come from? There is nothing more arrogant than taking things for granted. A heart that takes for granted never knows gratitude.

We have to put aside the habit of repaying favors and liquidating our gratitude. No matter how hard we work, we cannot repay God’s grace. No matter how powerful we are, we cannot live a day without God’s hand. We should not take anything we enjoy for granted, but we should be able to recognize the mysterious hand of grace that is constantly poured out on every moment of our lives.

**True Gratitude**

Let’s focus on the person who came back and gave thanks to Jesus. What made him give true thanksgiving? He must also have been overjoyed for his wondrous healing. But he was not captivated by what was given to him, he could look at the giver of the gift. He didn’t forget the One who gave behind that gift. That was the reason he came back and knelt down in front of Jesus.

True gratitude begins with looking at the ‘gift giver’ without being blinded by the joy of receiving the gift. Looking at the ‘gift giver’ rather than the ‘gift’ is the starting point of true gratitude. But we should go one step further and be able to ask this question. ‘Why does God give me grace?’ When we suffer, we complain to God, ‘why me? why are you giving me this kind of suffering?’ But when we receive grace and enjoy blessings, we don't seem to ask, ‘why me? why are you giving me this kind of grace?’

Just as suffering is not due to our faults, so grace and blessing are not due to what we deserve. God makes us examine our lives through suffering, but through grace and blessing, God often entrusts us with something to do. Therefore, when there is something to be thankful for, don't just enjoy it for granted. Just as we meditate on the meaning of suffering, we should also meditate on the meaning of blessing and grace.

Only one out of ten who received the wonderful grace and gift of recovering from leprosy showed genuine gratitude. This means that few people practice true gratitude. Jesus said to the nine lepers who were scattered because of selfish or proud gratitude, **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”** But he said to the one leper who fell at Jesus’ feet and gave his sincere gratitude, **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

**Wrap Up**

A person of true gratitude is not caught up in the joy of being blessed when others still have not been blessed, but rather thinking about what he/she can do for those who have not been blessed. A person of true gratitude is someone who can think of the grace of God, who has given him/her health and ability to work hard, even if it is the result of his/her hard work. A person of true gratitude is one who does not take everything for granted, but meditates on the mystery of the amazing grace as to why God blesses him/her.

Looking back over the past year, God has blessed us all with blessings and grace in various ways. If you really believe that God has been gracious to you, let’s give thanks. Instead of fixing your eyes on the gift you received, look at the One who gave you that gift, and think deeply about why He is giving you such blessings and grace. And let's become children of true gratitude who know how to use the blessings and graces given to us for the Kingdom of God.