

Thanksgiving Day: Holy Trinity Church: November 23, 2017

Luke 17: 1-19

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I saw a television commercial from Citibank that was quite unique. The bank wanted to say “thank you” to their customers for using their credit cards, so they were starting a rewards program whereby you could earn cash back just for using their card. One of the commercials involved two women in a grocery store. One woman put her hand on the stomach of the other and asked her when her baby was due. The woman looks at her and says, “I’m not pregnant.” Not knowing what else to say, the embarrassed woman replies, “Thank you.” With this simple reply, “Thank you,” the offended woman forgets the insulting words that were just uttered, and the two women embrace. Citibank then flashed their slogan across the screen that states, “It’s amazing what a simple thank you can do.”

Well, it is amazing what a simple thank you can do. And who isn’t disappointed when you do something for someone else, and they forget to speak those two words?

It happened to Jesus at least once that we know of. He was on his way to Jerusalem. He was traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men with leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, Jesus said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed from the leprosy. One of them, a Samaritan, seeing that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to this grateful Samaritan, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” “Where are the other nine?” That’s the question that has been asked by priests, pastors and Sunday school teachers for over 2,000 years. Ten were healed, but only one bothered to come back to say, “Thank you.” Where were the other nine? We don’t know where they were, but I am glad you are here in God’s house on this Thanksgiving Day.

It’s important to say thank you, isn’t it? I hope that’s why you are here, out of a genuine sense of gratitude for what God has done for you. It’s important to say thank you, whether to God or to others who have blessed your life.

I always enjoyed, “On the Road with Charles Kuralt.” On one of those broadcasts, Kuralt was in Moscow. An older gentleman, with a lapel full of war medals, approached him. This older man was a Russian doctor during World War II. He was captured by the Germans and placed in a POW camp. The Germans were particularly hard on Russian POWs. Americans in the same camp had an abundance of food in comparison. The Russians were only given a bowl of thin, cold turnip soup each day. As a result, hundreds of them died. With tears streaming down his face, the Russian doctor told Charles Kuralt about a group of American soldiers who risked their lives to smuggle food to the starving Russians. He wrote down a list of their names as best he could remember them, and asked Kuralt to find them. It was a painstaking task, but Kuralt found each of the American soldiers who were still living. He arranged for a meeting. The old Russian doctor was flown to Phoenix, Arizona to be reunited with some of the men who risked their lives to save him from starvation. In the Phoenix airport, after forty years, the Russian doctor saw his fellow captives and was finally able to say, “Thank you.”

It’s important to say thank you. Jesus healed ten men with leprosy. Only one returned to say thank you. I think Jesus might have been disappointed. It wasn’t that he needed their gratitude. He did not. But how could they truly be

healed both physically and spiritually if they didn't have a sense of gratitude in their hearts?

That is why Thanksgiving Day is so important for us. God doesn't need our thanks. God is all sufficient. God needs nothing. It is we who need to say thank you. A sense of gratitude is one of the surest signs of spiritual health. Saying thanks is a way of reminding ourselves that all we have we owe to God. It is so easy in an affluent culture to think that the blessings we enjoy were earned by our own efforts. We forget the people who gave of themselves that we might have this land of plenty. And it is easy to forget the God who is the source of all blessings.

And the more we have the more tempting it is to forget. That is the demonic thing about affluence. It causes us not only to feel entitled; it causes us to actually look down our noses at those who have not been so blessed. If we have the heart of Jesus Christ that is the very last thing we would do. Rather, our sentiments would be like those expressed in a poem I once read by an unknown author:

“Even though I clutch my blanket and growl when the alarm rings, thank you, Lord, that I can hear. There are many who are deaf.

“Even though I keep my eyes closed against the morning light as long as possible, thank you, Lord, that I can see. Many are blind.

“Even though I huddle in my bed and put off rising, thank you Lord, that I have the strength to rise. There are many who are bedridden.

“Even though the first hour of my day is hectic, when socks are lost, toast is burned, and tempers are short, my children are so loud, thank you, Lord, for my family. There are many who are alone.

“Even though our breakfast table never looks like the pictures in magazines and the menu is at times unbalanced, thank you, Lord, for the food we have. There are so many who are hungry.

“Even though the routine of my job is often monotonous, thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to work. There are many who have no job.

“Even though I grumble and bemoan my fate from day to day and wish my circumstances were not so modest, thank you, Lord, thank you for my life today.”

We need to remind ourselves that God is the source of everything that is.

When we say thank you, it is a reminder of the One who is the source of it all.

Of course the best way to express our appreciation to God is by an act of kindness to one of God's children.

In his book, *Try Giving Yourself Away*, David Dunn tells about a woman in the lobby of the Union Depot in Cincinnati who was waiting for a train. She saw a young girl, about 15 years of age, sitting alone in the corner of the depot. As she watched, a mother with two crying children and an armload of packages entered the train station and sat down across from the young girl. Before the mother could get settled into her seat, the teenage girl hopped up and went over to her. "Can I take care of your two children while you go out to get something to eat?" she asked. "You look a little tired and the next train isn't due for a while, so why don't you let me help you? I'm very good with children." In today's world a mother would be suspicious of such an offer. But, this was in simpler times and a less violent world. The startled mother said, "Oh, thank you! That would be wonderful." And she left the two little girls in the care of this anonymous and generous baby sitter. A little later the mother returned looking relaxed and refreshed. "Thank you so much," she said. "Are you catching the next train?" asked the teenager. "Yes," she replied, "as soon as I can get everything together." "Let me help you," said the young girl and she gathered all of the woman's packages and headed toward the train. After they boarded, she waved and said goodbye. Then she turned,

went back into the train lobby and sat down. She wasn't seated more than 10 minutes when she spotted another mother with children. She walked over and volunteered to baby-sit once again. After a while that mother boarded a train, and then this drifting helper found another mother and did the same thing. By this time the observer was puzzled enough to approach the youth and say to her, "I'm curious. I've been watching you for an hour or so, and you've spent the entire time helping these young mothers and their children. Why are you doing this?" "Oh," she said, "I was one of five children. My dad was in the Army and we were always moving from one place to another. My mom got so tired carrying the packages and suitcases and caring for all of us. I remember her saying to me, 'You are so good with children.' My dad went to war and he never came back, so that left my mom alone. And she just recently died, so I thought that maybe I could do something for others in her memory because she said I was so good with kids. I thought there would be a lot of mothers who would be tired here, so that's why I come often to this depot. It makes me feel good, doing it for her. It really helps."

That young lady was expressing gratitude for her own mother by assisting other women caring for their children and their many other responsibilities.

It's important to say thank you, isn't it? That's what Thanksgiving Day is all about. It reminds us that everything we have is a gift from God. Of course, the best way to say thanks to God is to pay it forward and do something kind for one of God's children. How about us? Is there someone we need to thank? In answer to this rhetorical question, yes there is, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, I want to wish all of you a Happy Thanksgiving. I thank you for being such a blessing and such a gift from God in my life. Amen.