

Thanksgiving
November 23, 2011

Don't Forget to Say Thank You

Pastor Michael Ewart
Luke 17:11-19

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever wondered: Why do good manners come so unnaturally to us? If you have kids, you know its hard. But if you think back to your own childhood, how many times did you parents remind you of good manners? When I was a kid, I remember what a stickler my Dad was for good manners. And I was just not a natural. "Elbows off the table! Chew with your mouth shut! Slide your plate closer to you! All four feet of your chair should be on the ground!" When I asked for something to be passed, I often missed the word please. My Dad's way of reminding me was just to say, "What?" "Pass the milk." What? Pass the milk. What? Pass the milk! What? The third time I usually got it. "Would you please pass the milk?" And when the item was passed, I often forgot the thank you. "What do you say?" "Thank you." And at birthdays or Christmas when Grandpa or Grandma were there, I was reminded, "Don't forget to say thank you."

And that's what I'm calling today's message, "Don't forget to say thank you." Why is it so important to say thank you? And of course on the eve of Thanksgiving, what I'm really asking is, "Why is it so important to thank God?" I'm just going to let you think about that question for a while. Keep it in your mind as we hear the following story from Luke 17:11-19.

It was already toward the end of Jesus earthly ministry. He was on his way to Jerusalem where he would celebrate the Passover for the last time. **"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him.**

These 10 men had a real problem. They had a horrible skin disease called leprosy. In modern times leprosy can be treated and cured. But in Bible times, the disease was unstoppable. It begins with the discoloration of a patch of skin – often on the nose, ear, cheek or chin. The disease then spreads in all directions. Diseased parts are prone to secondary infection and damage. Disfigurement is common. Internal organs are also affected. The disease is long lasting. An untreated patient may suffer from 10 to 20 years before death occurs. Aside from the physical horror of this disease, in Biblical times, the infected person was also quarantined from the rest of society. He had to live in isolated colonies with other leprosy victims. They could only see family and friends from a great distance, never to be near them or touch them again. Occasionally it happened that a person was healed of the disease. In such cases he was to show himself to a priest who would examine him and declare him clean. Only then could he rejoin society.

They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" How do these men dealt with their problem? To whom did they turn for help? In whom did they trust in life's darkest hour? They turned to Jesus, the one they identify as "Master," for help. They knew him by name, which means they must have known something about Jesus, his life, and his teaching. But what did they know specifically? It's not said. They trusted that he had enough power and enough love to help them. They were thoroughly convinced that they were powerless to help themselves, and Jesus was powerful to help.

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Because leprosy made a person ceremonially unclean, a purification rite was necessary before a leper could reenter society. The priest would examine the leper, and if there was no trace of the disease, he was declared clean. Note that the instruction preceded the healing! When Jesus gave the command, they still had the disease. Yet they trusted him and did what he said.

"And as they went, they were cleansed." That's the whole description. Just stated briefly and factually, "They were cleansed." As they walked the disease disappeared. In other words, they had put some distance between themselves and Jesus. That's significant

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. One of the 10... just 10% of those healed... was moved to return, find Jesus and worship and thank him. The amazing thing was that the man who returned was a Samaritan. We've talked about this before... the Jews and Samaritans were enemies. Yet he is the one who returned to the Jewish man who healed him and thanked him.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Jesus was amazed and sad. 9 out of 10 didn't return to thank him. But the foreigner, the Samaritan, did. And for it, he received a special encouragement from Jesus. His faith had made him well. His trust that Jesus was the powerful Son of God who heals was confirmed and reinforced. That man went with a double blessing.

1. Position of helplessness
 - a. We truly are helpless. Have you ever just had a bad day? I wonder if God lets us have bad days just so we can once in a while come to grips with the fact that we're really not in control. We are helpless. There is absolutely nothing you can do to stop the guy behind you who is texting and driving from rear ending you. You can't stop the common cold. You can't stop cancer from growing in your body. (Sure I can! Be healthy! No way. Still happens.) You can't stop the flood or the tornado. You can't stop the thief that just stole your identity. You can't reverse the decision your boss made to lay you off. You can't stop the transmission on your car from going tomorrow. You can't stop the hair dresser from making that fatal snip followed by an "oops!" Bad days remind us of just how helpless we are.
 - b. And as helpless as we are when it comes to this world, how much greater is our dilemma when it comes to the spiritual. Born in sin, steeped in sin, we're born rebels. We sense the perfection he requires. His Word only confirms it. The catechism students just heard a couple passages yesterday: Holy. Perfect.
 - c. So what do we do?
 - i. Some foolishly think they aren't as helpless as they seem. They think they can rescue themselves. They don't turn to God for help.
 - ii. Others think it's pointless to ask God for help. They don't believe he exists. Or if he does, he doesn't care. Or if he does, he isn't able to do anything for them... or won't do anything for them.
 - d. But the lepers teach us something...
2. Appeal to the one who can help. (cf, lepers.)
 - a. Turn to Jesus, the all-powerful son of God for help. Why? He's got a reputation for helping people! The lepers heard it, believed and so they asked. You've heard it. You believe it... so ask!
3. He gives it!
 - a. Here's the amazing thing: He actually does help us. Jesus provides what we need. He gave the lepers what they asked for. Healing! He gives us healing too. Healing for our soul. For our lack of faith, our failure to trust him or ask him, for our failures to thank him... we don't deserve his help. We carry all this sin and guilt. We should carry it to our graves and to eternal punishment. But Jesus gives us what we don't deserve. Full and free forgiveness. Complete and total healing. He makes us spiritually clean. So we don't live quarantined from the Father. We live in a close relationship with him because of Jesus' life and death.
 - b. So he did this for us? Now what? Thank him!!!

4. Don't forget to say thank you.
 - a. Why don't we?
 - i. It's not convenient... we've already moved on.
 - ii. Enjoying the gift trumps thanking the giver. Have you seen a kid at Christmas immediately get in to a toy and he kind of become oblivious to everything else happening around him? And you have to remind? We enjoy the gift without acknowledging the giver. How offensive to God!
 - iii. The gift is taken for granted. (Like with our daily food and clothes.) No big deal.
 - iv. The giver is under appreciated. God's got everything. He's supposed to take care of me.
 - v. We think we deserved it.
 - vi. We're selfish.
 - b. How can we?
 - i. Acknowledge all of these reasons we haven't. Repent. And turn to God with a renewed appreciation for his undeserved gifts, love and kindness. How is appreciation renewed? 1) Honestly admit who you are. 2) Hear and remember who God is and what he's done for you.
 - ii. Thank him doing what? Say it... in prayer. Show it... by willing obedience to God. Say it... by witnessing. Show it... by loving your neighbor as yourself.
 - c. What happens when we do? Envision this... you thank God daily in your words and actions. What will happen as a result?
 - i. It's pleasing to God. He will smile.. Not complicated! Acknowledges and praises God... he gets credit for what he's done. When you show that you know that he is the reason for your blessing, he loves that! Sometimes we take what is good (the blessing) and we rejoice over *it*! We love *it*. We glory in *it*. And we forget that there was a generous, amazing giver who gave it. He is the one that we should rejoice over, love and glory in.
 - ii. It's good for you. It exercises our faith, and leads us back to the giver. (Every trip you make back to the Giver will build your relationship with you. When you don't forget his benefits and instead thank him, you remember who he is and what he's done.) It reveals a heart that is centered on God, not self. It's good for us to remember who we are really. And who God is really. Opposite of selfishness!
 - iii. It can impact others. Others may be led to acknowledge and praise God for what he's done. (No record of this with the 1 leper. But can't we expect that the one who was vocally thankful to Jesus would have shared the powerful and healing name of Jesus with others? Won't you do that too?)

Brothers and sisters, at the Thanksgiving meal this year, use good manners. Say please and thank you. Keep your elbows off the table. Don't lean back in your chair. Keep your mouth closed when you chew. But first and foremost, don't forget to say thank you. Don't forget to say thank you to your God who is the source of all your earthly blessings. But more important, he's the source of all of your eternal blessings too. He didn't owe us any of it... it's just a ridiculously generous gift he gives... that's who he is. Not just tomorrow, but the rest of your life... what do you say to God? You say "Thank you!" And don't just say it... live it! Amen.