**Luke 17:11-19 November 25, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thanks for nothing. What a snarky thing to say, don’t you think? The implication being that you have received absolutely nothing from this person, this thing, perhaps even this year, that you could possibly be thankful for. Thanks for nothing, or another way to say it, I will not give thanks for you, for it, for this. What would make you say such a thing? What could make you say those words in your own life? 2020 has been a year of hardships, of challenges and struggles concerning our health, our country, our relationships and the way that people treat each other. We can look back on 2020 and say that this year has been harder than usual, but can we truly say that nothing positive came out of it? Can we look back and say “thanks for nothing 2020”? I don’t think so.

Hardship shapes our own contentment, and without hardship we would always be in a state of comfort. This would change our mindset when it comes to what we have and affect how often we give thanks for the mundane. If 2020 has given us anything positive, it’s a renewed thankfulness for our health. Even if we have health problems, we are reminded of what a gift it is to be healthy and not laid up in bed due to severe illness. We can think of those who have lost their taste and smell, or who must be on a ventilator and thank God that we haven’t faced that fate. Usually our thanks would come from an alleviation of all aches, pains, bruises, and discomforts, but faced with the reality of our baseline health being much worse, we have to say thank you God for allowing us even to breathe, to live, and to continue on in our lives.

That’s the lesson from the 10 lepers. Of course we’re talking here about thankfulness, it’s why it appears every year on Thanksgiving regardless of what year we are on in the 3-year lectionary, but this year especially we can see parallels to our own lives in the plight of the lepers. These men were diagnosed with a disease that left them isolated from their families, isolated from society, they had to distance themselves from others and make sure that others knew about their very infectious disease so that they didn’t transmit it to others. We see our plight, in their plight. Isolation, loneliness, separation, distance, and despair.

And yet hope. They are still alive. They still have the comfort of each other. They form their own small groups and travel together. They aren’t alone. Jesus is even willing to speak to them and heal them. Now there’s something to be thankful for, and of course 1 leper returns, giving thanks to God for the healing. That’s the thanksgiving lesson we see every year, but more than that, what does this man have to be thankful for? “And Jesus said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” Which way was he going? That’s where we see God’s providing care which should elicit thanksgiving from us every day of our lives and not just on Thanksgiving. Where was he going? Back to his family. Back to work. Back to life. Not as a king, not to riches and fame, but he was going back to normal. And he was thankful for that normalcy, because he had endured isolation and separation from the life that he had due to hardship and disease.

The early Pilgrims after those first hard years had a custom for a while that at their Thanksgiving Day there would be five kernels of corn on each plate. Before the big meal each would have to mention five things for which to be thankful. The five kernels reminded them that at one time that was the daily allotment of corn – five kernels per person, per day.

I’m sure that at some point you’ve had to do something similar, whether it was at a family thanksgiving dinner or in school or with friends, or even just challenging yourself to do it alone. This doesn’t have to be the end of that tradition even if you are celebrating Thanksgiving alone this year or separated by your loved ones yet still talking on the phone or connecting via a video chat. Take a moment and think about what you are thankful to God for. My guess is in those moments you name the big stuff. Family. Friends. That promotion at work. That bonus of money, that new boat, the engagement in the family, the birth of children, the really big stuff. You name one or two big things and move on. But think about the challenge of the Pilgrims. Name 5. 5 to remind you of when you only had 5 kernels of corn to eat. Hardship would bring perspective. I’m thankful to have more to eat than just a few kernels of corn. I’m thankful for this meal, because I can remember when I didn’t even have one. I’m thankful for the things I have, because I remember a time when I didn’t even have them. A child can look around a room if they really have to stretch their minds and give answers to what they are thankful for like “the lamp, or the carpet, or the plate, or the refrigerator” and they aren’t wrong! Those are blessings that are often overlooked. Perspective in the midst of hardship brings thankfulness for even the mundane and ordinary.

We fail at this, often in our daily lives. We overlook the ordinary, the mundane, the usual, the “normal” so to speak. We want more from God. We want the big stuff. Once God gives me the big stuff, then I will say thank you, but I expect the normal stuff. I expect to have food to eat and water to drink. I expect to have good health, good family, good friends, good weather, peace and civility in my country. I expect a certain level of prosperity, I don’t want to have to face loss or trouble, and if I do I certainly won’t thank God for that, I will curse him, I will blame him, I will take my frustrations out on him for not preventing that pain from coming upon me. 2020 won’t be a year of thankfulness to God for the fact that I’m still here, with food in my pantry, with heat in my house, with clothes on my back, oh no no no. Thanks for absolutely nothing God.

Hardship has brought about separation in those instances, we are pushed away from God rather than toward the place of comfort and peace. The lepers desired to go to the temple to be declared clean, and Jesus sends them in that direction. They are given back their lives, they are welcomed back to society, not in a special place of prominence, but they are given back the mundane and normal work that they had before this disease upended their lives. God is with us in hardship, in trials, in worry, in anxiety, in problems, and still provides even in times of hardship the basics of what we need. You are to thank God when he fulfills the wants of your life. But God provides for your needs. For your greatest need, of forgiveness from sin, from the ultimate source of separation, lockdown, isolation, and despair. God provides what you need, in a way that may seem mundane, normal, boring, and repetitive. In a way that you were taught long ago as a child, but still remains true. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world as a baby, born to a world of sin, born to sinful parents, to die for sinners, to save them from their sin, and rose again to declare victory over death so that you will never die, but instead live eternally with him.

This is extraordinary, amazing, special, and should be given thanks for every single day of your life! And even if you’ve heard it a thousand times, and it’s become repetitive, and dull, and boring, and the same….it’s still true. It’s still as true today, as it was back when he did it, when he accomplished that salvation for you. And in the years when things seem the hardest, when it’s one bad thing after another and there seems to be little in life to be thankful for, remember that truth, remember your greatest treasure, Jesus Christ, the one who loves you enough to die for you, and that you are saved by his love and his work in your life. He is with you. He loves you. You are not alone. Whether you are in isolation, quarantine, lockdown, celebrating Thanksgiving by yourself with a turkey dinner for one, you are not alone. God is with you, God loves you, and He’s never left you. Give thanks for that unchanging truth.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our thoughts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.