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November 27, 2019—Thanksgiving Eve

Sermon Text: Luke 17:11-19—The Thanksgiving Mindset

There is a point of contention in my household. At the same time every year, the dispute resurfaces. Battle lines are drawn, arguments are made, tensions run high. OK, it's not that serious. But every year around mid-November, my wife starts itching to listen to Christmas music and decorate our house. I, however, am a staunch—OK, stubborn—traditionalist that you don't celebrate Christmas until after Thanksgiving. Anyone else have this yearly debate?

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that you're not truly thankful if you get into the Christmas spirit before Thanksgiving Day. But I wonder if sometimes Thanksgiving gets shortchanged. As Black Friday shopping creeps further into Thanksgiving Day every year, do we prioritize giving thanks to God for his myriad blessings? Or does giving thanks get overshadowed by everything else going on this time of year?

On the other hand, if we only prioritize being thankful 1 day of the year, and spend the other 364 days discontent and griping, is that really any better? British author Charles Dickens commented that we Americans have it backwards. Instead of 1 day of thanksgiving, Dickens said we should have 364. ***“Use one day just for complaining and griping, and use the other 364 days to thank God each day for the many blessings he has showered upon you.”***

As smart as Dickens' sentiment is, I think we can do him one better. Whether you start celebrating Christmas the second the last Trick-or-Treater leaves, or wait until you've polished off the pumpkin pie, we can be thankful all 365, even without a planned griping day. How? By maintaining ***The Thanksgiving Mindset*** all year long! But what does that mindset look like? And how can we keep it year-round?

We see it modeled in the actions of a Samaritan leper. As Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem, he entered a village on the border between the regions of Samaria and Galilee. There, he heard a chorus of voices calling to him from a distance, ***“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”***

The voices belonged to ten men inflicted with the infectious skin disease, leprosy. In Jesus' day, there were no treatments for leprosy, and because of its infectious nature, God had commanded the Israelites that anyone with leprosy had to be separated from their family, friends, and the rest of society, living outside of the town alone, or in a colony of lepers. The life of a leper was painful and lonely. If anyone approached them, they had to cry out in a loud voice, “Unclean! Unclean!”

But as they saw Jesus approaching, these lepers used loud voices to cry out to the one who could make them clean! This wasn't Jesus' first encounter with lepers. Earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus touched a leper, and healed the man immediately. So you can imagine word had spread through the leper communities about this Jesus guys! And so, trusting that Jesus could cleanse them too, they begged him to show them mercy.

Jesus' response is extremely interesting. Jesus had touched and immediately cleansed the other leper he'd healed. But with this group of lepers, he simply tells them, ***“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”*** He didn't touch them. They weren't immediately healed. He just sent them on their way, still leprous, to see the priests, who had to declare them clean before they could rejoin society. It was a test of their faith. And by going, these lepers showed their trust that Jesus would heal them. And Jesus didn't disappoint! ***“As they went, they were cleansed.”***

All ten lepers trusted that Jesus could heal them, and cried out to him. All ten lepers obeyed Jesus' order and went to see the priests, even though they were still leprous. And all ten were healed by Jesus.

And yet, when we discuss this account, we only praise one of them, not all ten. That's because only one, the Samaritan leper, had the thanksgiving mindset. I think that's another reason Jesus waited to heal them until they were further away from him. Just as he'd tested their faith, he was also testing their thankfulness.

Are you more likely to thank a person for something they did for you when you're right there with them? Or when you're a distance away? Especially if you couldn't text them thanks but had to travel on foot! By healing the lepers once they were further away, Jesus was testing to see which of them had the thanksgiving mindset.

Only one did. ***"When he saw he was healed, [he] came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan."*** Shortly before, he'd been crying out with a loud voice, begging Jesus for mercy. Now, he was crying out with a loud voice, thanking Jesus for his mercy!

But what was so different about this man, that only he came back? Was he the only one who trusted in Jesus? No, the other 9 lepers had also shown strong trust that Jesus could cleanse them. Was it because he was a Samaritan? If anything, that made him LESS likely to come back and thank Jesus, since Samaritans and Jews were enemies! So what was different?

I think the difference was that this cleansed Samaritan leper had the thanksgiving mindset. What I mean by the thanksgiving mindset, is that his focus was shifted. Rather than focusing on himself, or focusing on the gift he'd received, he was focused on the giver of the gift.

It's not that the other nine weren't thankful, or that they didn't trust. They may have even praised God as they sprinted to get cleared by the priests. But their mindset was primarily focused on the gift they'd received from Jesus, and what that gift would mean for them, rather than on the giver himself. And can we blame them? These men could once again see their family and friends and rejoin society! But they didn't return to give thanks to Jesus, because they were focused on the gift more than the giver.

Like the nine lepers, we also sometimes become so focused on the gift, that we lose sight of the giver. Or instead of giving thanks to the giver, we give the credit to ourselves. If we get a job promotion, it's easy to think about how this will change your life, or about how hard you worked. But do you stop and thank God, who gave you that gift?

While it's understandable to focus primarily on the gift instead of the giver, that mindset leads to not every day being a day of thanksgiving. Because some days, we don't see blessings and gifts pouring in. Not that blessings aren't there, but sometimes, the difficulties and struggles blind us from the many reasons we can be thankful. And on those days, if we aren't focused on the giver, our days become filled with griping and discontentment, rather than thanksgiving.

But a thanksgiving mindset, where we're focused on the giver, changes the way we live our lives. First, focusing on God, the giver, gives us contentment. When we focus on the gift, it leads us to want more. But when we focus on the giver, then whatever I've received, I can say, "This is what God wants me to have." As the Apostle Paul talked about in the second lesson, the secret to being content in all circumstances is to focus on God, who gives us strength.

When I focus on the giver rather than the gift, I look at the gift differently. Gifts often have a more profound value, depending on who they're from. When my daughter gives me a scribbly doodle drawing because she loves me, that scribbly doodle drawing has more value to me because it's from her. In the same way, each gift

from God takes on more profound value, because it's from him. Even things much more basic than being cleansed of leprosy—daily bread, a roof over your head, the clothes on your back, the love of your family—everything takes on greater value when you focus on the fact that it's a gift from God. And when even the simplest basic things are seen as a gift from God, then there's never a day when you don't have something to be thankful for!

You can also have 365 days of thanksgiving when you focus on everything the giver has done for you. Jesus may have cleansed the lepers from their leprosy, but he has cleansed you from the even deadlier disease of sin. Jesus sent the lepers to the priests, because only the priests could declare them clean. Jesus, our great High Priest has cleansed us from our sins with his death on the cross! And with his glorious resurrection, he has declared that we are clean, through faith in him!

No matter what's going on in your life, good or bad, you can always have a day of thanksgiving when you focus on the fact that the giver, your Savior Jesus, has given you the greatest gift of forgiveness and salvation—and that gift is yours, every day, for eternity!

Here's a challenge for your next 365. I borrowed the thought from a book called "364 Days of Thanksgiving." Every day for the next year, write down one thing that you're thankful for. The catch is, you can't repeat any answers. So, at the end of the year, you'll have 364 different things recorded that you're thankful for. Then, on day 365, don't gripe, but read through them, and give thanks to the one who gave you all those blessings!

Imagine how much different the next 365 days will look if each day when you wake up, instead of thinking about your struggles, or the things you want, or the things you don't have; instead of thinking about the gift, think about the giver. How much different will the next 365 look if every day you wake up with a song of praise to God in your heart and on your lips. If every day, the first thought that pops into your mind is, "***This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.***" Start each day, throwing yourself down at the feet of Jesus, like the Samaritan leper, and thank him for his mercy. Then it doesn't matter when you start celebrating Christmas, because every day is a day of thanksgiving!