

Luke 17:11-19
November 18, '18

“THANKS LIVING”

TODAY IS THANKSGIVING SUNDAY.

IT IS ALSO COMMITMENT SUNDAY.

YOU SEE THAT AT THE TOP OF YOUR BULLETIN.

THAT’S UNUSUAL FOR A COUPLE OF REASONS.

FOR ONE THING, THANKSGIVING SUNDAY – THE SUNDAY PRIOR TO THANKSGIVING - DOES NOT USUALLY COINCIDE WITH COMMITMENT SUNDAY.

IN FACT, I DON’T THINK IT EVER HAS AT EASTMINSTER.

THAT’S ONE REASON THIS SUNDAY IS UNUSUAL.

ANOTHER REASON IS BECAUSE ORDINARILY THANKSGIVING SUNDAY COINCIDES – NOT WITH COMMITMENT SUNDAY – BUT RATHER CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY.

THAT MAY NOT SEEM LIKE A BIG DEAL TO YOU, BUT TO ME, IT IS, AS WE ADHERE TO THE LECTIONARY IN SUNDAY WORSHIP.

CHRIST THE KING – OR REIGN OF CHRIST – SUNDAY IS THE LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH CALENDAR.

THE SUNDAY AFTER THAT IS THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT – OR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR.

THAT ORDINARILY FALLS ON THE SUNDAY IMMEDIATELY AFTER THANKSGIVING.

NOT THIS YEAR, THOUGH.

NEXT SUNDAY IS REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY AND WHAT ALL OF THAT MEANS IS THAT THIS YEAR WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PUT OUR FOCUS MORE ON THANKSGIVING THAN WE ORDINARILY DO.

THEREFORE, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT RARE OCCURRENCE.

I LIKE THE WORDS OF ONE WRITER WHO HAS GIVEN US A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE FIRST THANKSGIVING.

HE PUTS IT THIS WAY:

“THE DEVOUT HEROES OF THANKSGIVING, THE PILGRIMS, CAME DURING A TIME OF TURMOIL IN BOTH ENGLAND & ALL OF EUROPE.

THEY WOULD CARRY THE SEEDS OF THE REFORMATION, ALONG WITH OTHER EARLY SETTLERS, AND THOSE SEEDS WOULD BE SOWN, RESULTING & BLOSSOMING INTO ONE CHERISHED RIGHT IN OUR NATION – THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION.

WHEN THE PILGRIMS DROPPED ANCHOR IN NEW ENGLAND & SET FOOT UPON PLYMOUTH ROCK ONE WINTRY DECEMBER MORNING AND, IN THE WORDS OF THE POET SAMUEL HARDEN STILLE, ‘CARVED 1620 ON THE MARBLE OF INFINITY,’ AFTER A PERILOUS CROSSING ON THE ATLANTIC ON BOARD THE MAYFLOWER, WHAT LAY AHEAD FOR THIS BRAVE BAND OF SAINTS & STRANGERS WAS A CRUEL WINTER, SICKNESS & DEATH AND FEAR OF INDIANS.

BUT ARMED WITH AXES, MUSKETS, THEIR BIBLES & OTHER BELONGINGS, AND BEING BLESSED BY HELP FROM FRIENDLY WAMPANOAG WARRIORS, THE PILGRIMS CARVED OUT NEW HOMES & A NEW CHURCH OUT OF THE NEW ENGLAND WILDERNESS, AND REAPING UP A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST, THEY WERE READY FOR A HOLIDAY IN WHICH FEASTING, GAMES, FRIVOLITY & THANKING GOD WAS THE ORDER OF THE DAY.

THAT DAY, OF COURSE, IS THANKSGIVING, AND WHEN WE HEAR THEIR STORY EACH YEAR IN NOVEMBER, THAT STORY FOREVER SHINES.

I LIKE THOSE WORDS ABOUT THANKSGIVING – THE EXPLANATION OF ITS ORIGIN & ITS MEANING FOR US TODAY.

IT TEACHES US – NOT JUST ABOUT THANKSGIVING – BUT ABOUT “THANKS LIVING” – NOT JUST “GIVING” THANKS BUT LIVING OUT THAT THANKS IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE STORY THAT WE’VE HEARD THIS MORNING FROM LUKE’S GOSPEL, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH IT FITS PERFECTLY INTO A THANKSGIVING – OR “THANKS LIVING” THEME & IT SEEMS TO DO SO IN A VERY CLEAR & UNMISTAKABLE FASHION.

THIS IS, IN FACT, THE SUGGESTED GOSPEL READING FOR AN OBSERVANCE OF THANKSGIVING & ONE THAT WE FREQUENTLY CONSIDER WHEN WE’RE THINKING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THANKING GOD FOR OUR BLESSINGS.

10 LEPERS ARE HEALED & ONLY ONE RETURNS TO THANK JESUS FOR THAT HEALING.

IN FACT, JESUS HIMSELF POINTS THIS OUT IN THE PASSAGE – *“WERE NOT TEN MADE CLEAN? BUT THE OTHER NINE, WHERE ARE THEY?”*

IT IS SO CLEARLY AN APPROPRIATE PASSAGE FOR A SERMON ON THANKSGIVING THAT ONE MIGHT WONDER WHAT ELSE EVEN NEEDS TO BE ADDED TO GET THE POINT ACROSS.

THIS WEEK, THOUGH, I’VE BEEN STRUCK BY OTHER ELEMENTS OF THIS PASSAGE THAT MAY SPEAK TO US IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

I’D EVEN GO SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT THERE IS A POSITIVE MESSAGE TO BE GLEANED FROM THOSE NINE LEPERS WHO DIDN’T RETURN TO GIVE THANKS – THOSE WE SO OFTEN LOOK UPON WITH DISDAIN FOR THEIR FAILURE TO DO SO.

THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME IN LUKE'S GOSPEL THAT JESUS HAS HEALED A LEPER.

WAY BACK IN THE FIFTH CHAPTER, HE WAS APPROACHED BY A LEPER WHO CALLED OUT TO HIM, "*LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN.*"

JESUS RESPONDED BY SAYING, "*I AM WILLING*" AND HE TOUCHED THE MAN AND HE WAS HEALED.

IT'S NOT OUT OF THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT THESE LEPERS WE'VE READ ABOUT THIS MORNING WERE WELL AWARE OF THIS PREVIOUS HEALING.

THEY MAY VERY WELL HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATING THE SAME KIND OF HEALING FOR THEMSELVES.

THAT'S NOT WHAT HAPPENS HERE, THOUGH, IS IT?

JESUS DOESN'T SAY "*I'M WILLING TO HEAL YOU.*"

JESUS DOESN'T TOUCH THEM & HEAL THEM.

NO - INSTEAD, HE SIMPLY SAYS, "*GO & SHOW YOURSELVES TO THE PRIESTS.*"

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS, TO ME, TRULY EXTRAORDINARY & SOMETHING THAT SHOULD FORCE US TO LOOK AT ALL 10 LEPERS – NOT JUST THE ONE – IN A POSITIVE WAY.

THEY DIDN'T COMPLAIN.

THEY DIDN'T SAY, "*HEY, WAIT A MINUTE. YOU TOUCHED THAT OTHER LEPER & HEALED HIM. CAN'T YOU DO THE SAME FOR US?*"

THEY DIDN'T BECOME DEJECTED & GIVE UP HOPE.

THE VERY NEXT WORDS ARE "*AND AS THEY WENT...*"

WHAT THAT TELLS US IS THAT THEY IMMEDIATELY OBEYED WHAT JESUS INSTRUCTED THEM TO DO.

IT DIDN'T SEEM TO MAKE ANY SENSE & YET THEY DID IT ANYWAY.

AND LUKE SAYS “*AND AS THEY WENT – THEY WERE HEALED.*”

WHAT MATTERED WAS SIMPLY THAT THEY WERE OBEDIENT.

THEY TRUSTED JESUS & THROUGH THEIR TRUST IN HIM, THEY WERE HEALED.

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE HERE, THOUGH, THAT I THINK IS ALSO VITALLY IMPORTANT & SOMETHING THAT I THINK RELATES VERY CLEARLY TO OUR CELEBRATION OF THANKSGIVING.

LUKE MAKES A POINT OF SAYING THAT ONE OF THESE TEN LEPERS WAS A SAMARITAN.

LUKE IS THE ONLY ONE OF THE GOSPEL WRITERS WHO GIVES US THIS STORY.

LUKE IS ALSO THE ONLY ONE WHO GIVES US THE STORY WE KNOW AS “THE GOOD SAMARITAN.”

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT LUKE WANTING TO TELL US OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE GOSPEL.

THERE'S SOMETHING HE WANTS TO TELL US ABOUT THE ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGNERS – SOMETHING ABOUT BARRIERS BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS BEING BROKEN DOWN – SOMETHING ABOUT THE UNITY THAT ALL OF US SHARE TOGETHER AS GOD'S CHILDREN.

PART OF WHAT MAY HAVE ENABLED THIS ONE SAMARITAN TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH NINE JEWS IS THEIR SHARED INFIRMITY.

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTATOR G. H. MORRISON PUTS IT LIKE THIS – “*IN SUFFERING & PROFOUND AFFLICTION, THERE IS THE TOUCH OF NATURE THAT MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD KIN.*”

IN SIMPLER & MORE COMMON TERMS – “*MISERY LOVES COMPANY.*”

WE ARE DRAWN TOGETHER IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY AND THAT WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE KEEP US APART BECOMES VIRTUALLY INSIGNIFICANT.

THINK OF THE WAY IN WHICH BOTH OF THESE CONNECT TO OUR CELEBRATION OF THANKSGIVING – AND ESPECIALLY TO THAT FIRST THANKSGIVING.

THERE’S THE UNITY WE ALL SHARE REGARDLESS OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS & THERE’S ALSO THE WAY IN WHICH SHARED MISFORTUNE BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER.

THAT WRITER WITH WHICH WE BEGAN THIS MORNING TELLS OF THE BOND THAT WAS FORGED BETWEEN THOSE WHO WERE LONG-TIME INHABITANTS OF THIS LAND & THE FOREIGNERS WHO HAD ARRIVED FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY.

HE SAYS, “*AFTER A DISASTROUS WINTER OF DEATH BEHIND THEM, THE PILGRIMS WERE STILL BUSY WORKING ON THEIR NEW SETTLEMENT WHEN, ONE DAY IN MARCH, A TALL INDIAN CAME TO THE SETTLEMENT WITH A GREETING.*”

***DAYS LATER, HE CAME BACK WITH ANOTHER INDIAN NAMED SQUANTO WHO STAYED WITH THE PILGRIMS AND TAUGHT THEM HOW TO PLANT CROPS, INCLUDING CORN.*”**

THE NATIVE AMERICANS & THE FOREIGNERS FROM ACROSS THE ATLANTIC SURELY WERE AS DIFFERENT AS ONE COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE & YET THEY SET THOSE DIFFERENCES ASIDE & JOINED TOGETHER.

AND PART OF WHAT UNITED THEM WAS A SHARED ADVERSITY.

ACCORDING TO THAT SAME WRITER, “SAMOSET, AFTER HIS ‘WELCOME ENGLISHMEN’ GREETING, TOLD THE PILGRIMS THIS LAND WAS THE LAND OF THE PATUXET, BUT EVERYONE IN HIS TRIBE HAD DIED FROM A TERRIBLE SICKNESS.”

THE PILGRIMS THEMSELVES HAD JUST ENDURED PRECISELY THE SAME THING WITH HALF OF THEIR NUMBER DYING OF DISEASE, COLD & HUNGER.

AS WITH THE LEPERS IN LUKE’S GOSPEL, IT WAS ADVERSITY THAT BROUGHT THE NATIVE AMERICANS & THE PILGRIMS TOGETHER.

THINK OF THE LESSONS THESE TWO STORIES CAN TEACH US – ABOUT THANKSGIVING & “THANKS LIVING.”

LUKE’S STORY OF THE COMMON BOND BETWEEN JEWS & SAMARITANS & THE FIRST THANKSGIVING STORY OF THE COMMON BOND BETWEEN NATIVE AMERICANS & ENGLISHMEN CAN SHOW US THE FOLLY OF OUR OWN PETTY DIVISIONS.

THOSE STORIES CAN TEACH US OF THE JOY THAT CAN BE EXPERIENCED WHEN WE SET THOSE DIVISIONS ASIDE & SEEK TO DISCOVER – NOT WHAT DIVIDES US – BUT WHAT UNITES US AS CHILDREN OF GOD.

BOTH STORIES ALSO HOLD A LESSON FOR US IN THE MANNER IN WHICH SHARED ADVERSITY CAN ENABLE US TO ENDURE THE MOST PAINFUL & CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES OF LIFE.

MAYBE IT’S A SUPPORT GROUP FOR THOSE IN A TIME OF GRIEF.

MAYBE IT’S A JOINT RECOVERY EFFORT IN A NATURAL CATASTROPHE.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD ABOUT THE DONATION THAT PROVIDED FREE COFFEE TO EVERY PATRON OF THE COMMONPLACE COFFEE

SHOP IN THE SQUIRREL HILL NEIGHBORHOOD IN PITTSBURGH RECEIVED AFTER THE TRAGEDY THERE TWO WEEKS AGO.

IT CAME FROM FOLKS IN NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT – THE SITE OF THE SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRAGEDY SIX YEARS AGO.

THAT DONATION WASN'T MUCH, BUT IT LET PEOPLE KNOW THERE WAS SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTOOD.

AND EVEN MORE THAN THAT, THERE WAS THE FUNDING EFFORT OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN PITTSBURGH THAT RAISED OVER \$200,000 TO COVER THE FUNERAL EXPENSES FOR THE JEWS KILLED IN THE TREE OF LIFE MASSACRE.

AS MUSLIMS, THEY UNDERSTAND THE ADVERSITY THAT IS BROUGHT ABOUT BY DISCRIMINATION.

THEY HAD A SHARED COMMON ADVERSITY THAT BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER IN A SPECIAL, TRAGIC BOND THAT UNITED THEM.

IT ALL COMES BACK TO THANKSGIVING – AND “THANKS LIVING” AS WELL.

WHEN WE LEARN TO TRUST – KNOWING THAT CHRIST IS THERE FOR US IN WHATEVER KIND OF ADVERSITY WE FACE – WE CAN MOVE AHEAD IN “THANKS LIVING” – GRATEFUL FOR THE BLESSINGS WE EXPERIENCE IN LIFE EVERY DAY.

I WANT TO GO BACK TO THAT SAME WRITER WHO TELLS US OF THAT FIRST THANKSGIVING & ITS MEANING FOR US TODAY.

HE CONCLUDES BY SAYING:

“IN HIS BOOK, OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION, WILLIAM BRADFORD WROTE, ‘THUS, OUT OF SMALL BEGINNINGS, AS ONE SMALL CANDLE MAY LIGHT A THOUSAND, SO THE LIGHT HERE KINDLED HATH SHONE

UNTO MANY, YEA – IN SOME SORT TO OUR WHOLE NATION, LET THE GLORIOUS NAME OF GOD HAVE ALL THE PRAISE.’

THUS, THROUGH THIS QUOTE, HE BEQUEATHS TO US THE REAL TRUE MEANING OF THAT JOYFUL, SACRED DAY IN AUTUMN WHEN WE TAKE TIME OUT TO GIVE THANKS FOR OUR BLESSINGS & OUR BOUNTIES.

INDEED, THANKSGIVING – THAT BLESSED FOURTH THURSDAY IN NOVEMBER, IS A TIME NOT JUST FOR TURKEY DINNERS & FOOTBALL.

IT IS A TIME WHEN WE ARE PROUD & BLESSED TO BE ONE OF THE ONLY NATIONS IN THE WORLD TO MAKE A DAY OF THANKS UNTO OUR LORD AS A NATIONAL HOLIDAY.

LET US KEEP THE CANDLE LIT TO HONOR OUR PILGRIM HEROES, FOR IN GOD’S EYES AS WELL AS OURS, THEIR STORY REMAINS FOREVER GOLDEN WITH EVERY NOVEMBER, LIKE THE GOLD LEAVES UPON BLUE NOVEMBER SKIES.

ALL OF US ARE PILGRIMS AT HEART, AND WE, BY GIVING OUR THANKS UNTO HIM MUST TASTE AND SEE THE BOUNTY, THE BEAUTY & THE GREAT GLORY OF OUR LORD.”

I LOVE THE BEAUTY OF THAT WRITER’S WORDS.

YOU MAY WISH TO READ EVEN MORE OF WHAT HE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THANKSGIVING & MAY WANT TO HAVE A COPY OF HIS ELOQUENT WORDS ABOUT IT.

IF YOU HAVE A CHILD, THAT CHILD IS ALREADY IN POSSESSION OF SUCH A COPY BECAUSE ALL OF THOSE WORDS ABOUT THANKSGIVING – AND “THANKS LIVING” - ARE THE WORDS OF OUR OWN ROLAND SMALL & THEY’RE FOUND IN HIS COLORING BOOK THAT WAS DISTRIBUTED TO OUR CHILDREN THIS MORNING.

**ROLAND HIMSELF IS A ROLE MODEL OF THE LESSONS WE CAN
LEARN FROM THIS STORY IN LUKE & THE STORY OF THE FIRST
THANKSGIVING.**

**THE ULTIMATE LESSON IS THIS - THANKSGIVING IS THANKS
LIVING. AMEN.**

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