

Sermon – Luke 17:11-19
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Grace Lutheran Church
Thanksgiving – Year A
23 November 2023

“Remember”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I'm sure some of you, as you settle in for this sermon, are wondering if you've forgotten anything? Did you remember? To set the table, set the oven timer, bake all that is needed for today's festivities? Thanksgiving dinner is not going to prepare itself, my friends. There is much to remember! Or perhaps your memory wanders further back today, beyond the demands of your to-do lists. Perhaps today you recall long trips to grandma's house, to folding tables set up for the kids in the not-quite-warm-enough screened-in-porch, to what seemed to be – at least through a child's eyes – a better, simpler time. Or perhaps today you do not remember so much as you feel forgotten, as the holiday season that begins with such hustle and bustle for others does not seem to have room for you. Thanksgiving is, in so many ways, a day for memories. This is as it should be; giving thanks begins with remembering.
2. When they first came into the land, the Lord told them to remember: You shall eat your fill, they are told, but “take care that you do not forget the Lord your God.” Take care, the Lord commands, so that you do not begin to imagine that your power and the might of your own hand have gotten you this wealth. Common to the stories we tell ourselves is that what we have is the result of our own efforts. While there is much to be commended about hard work, this is a failure of memory – a failure to remember those who have helped us along the way, to be sure, but even more a failure to

remember that all good things come from the hand of Lord. The story of God's people coming into the Land and promptly forgetting the One from whom all blessings flow is not so different from our own. Part of today's remembering is a distortion; we celebrate a gracious encounter between those who came to these shores from Europe and those who were indigenous to this land while papering over much that came after, when the newcomers took so much and then counted it as nothing more than they deserved. Such actions, rooted in the belief that there is not enough to go around and that we need to get as much as we can, are a failure of memory. Just this week I heard of a family – not from this congregation or community – that is being torn apart because they can't agree on the best way to divide the millions of dollars resulting from the sale of their business. Can you imagine? How often we write such stories, using our abundance, or our desire for it, to divide and separate us from one another.

3. Today, Jesus invites us to remember. Jesus enters into the space between Galilee and Samaria, an area marked with uncertainty and mistrust, a place where perhaps there does not seem to be enough grace to go around. There, he is met by ten lepers, those who because of their illness were welcome in neither place. "Jesus," they call out, "Master, have mercy on us!" And he does. Not because of anything they've done, anything they deserve; he simply chooses to have mercy, to show grace, to enact love for their sake. He has mercy upon them. They are not only healed. They are restored to their communities, their families, from which they were outcast. They can finally go home again to tables laden with food and houses filled with love. But nine quickly forget, it seems. I don't want to be too hard on the nine who don't come back to give thanks to Jesus. Their joy must have been so great, their desire to go home so strong. But one does remember – and this one a Samaritan – and he is blessed in the return. His faith, Jesus tells him, has made him well. He is no more physically healed than the other nine; that's not what Jesus means. Jesus gives us grace and healing beyond measure

simply because God loves us, not because we ask correctly or show enough gratitude. But still, thanks and faith open us up to something new: relationship with the One who is the source of all goodness, whose abundance calls us out of ourselves and our mis-remembering and into the truth. The truth that we have nothing on our own, that we receive everything from Christ. Remembering this simple truth opens up our hearts in faith toward God and in cheerful generosity toward those in need.

4. This Thanksgiving, we remember not only the Pilgrims who arrived at Plymouth Rock 400 years ago, but the many pilgrims who are making their way into our community even now. Leaving behind extortion, fear, and poverty on a journey of many months, new neighbors have migrated to our shores seeking a new home and renewed hope. Celebrating Thanksgiving for the first time creates an opportunity to express the gratitude that was already present. As reported in the *Tribune*, Maria and her family left Venezuela six years ago amid threats of violence. Last year, they began their journey to America, crossing border after border in the hope of finding a better life for their children. This week, they moved into an apartment of their own. This day of thanks is, Maria says, the “perfect time to give thanks to God for all the support we’ve gotten,” “for the city that has taken us in and is giving us the opportunity to progress as a family, as individuals.” The arrival of these modern-day pilgrims is an opportunity for us to show our thanks to God by giving to others. It is in giving, after all, that we become aware of just how much we have been given.
5. Today begins with remembering. We remember that Jesus has come into this world. That he has healed us, freed us from the powers of sin and death. Ushered us into a world of gracious and capacious abundance. Given his own life that we might live. And that he invites us even now to his feast. Whatever table you find yourselves at later, whether you are with many or alone, today you are welcomed by Christ, united with all the people of God, seated at the

feast of abundance that has no end. Turn around and thank Jesus. Turn to others with generosity. Remember the God who has not forgotten you. Remember, and celebrate the abundance of the God who gives everything to you, from green bean casserole to grace itself. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.