

**THANKSGIVING DAY**  
**November 26, 2009**  
**Paul Johnson**

Happy Thanksgiving, everybody. We thought it might be nice to sing a song after the gospel reading because if a musical version of the Gospel According to Luke were ever produced, this is one of those place there'd probably be a song. There's such joy, and such beauty in this little story...just one coming back to give thanks...don't you just sort of see him kicking up his heels...sometimes, there are reasons to sing a song, and for us to sing a song where we might not usually sing one so that we notice it a little bit...

It's Thanksgiving Day, everybody. There will be feasting today; and family, and friends; and traditions. And this, of course, is a tradition for us. Early on...in fact, for our first Thanksgiving...we decided that this was the way we'd start our Thanksgiving Day here at Christ Church. This would be one of our traditions...to gather on this day simply, and worship simply, and be at this thanksgiving table before we went to our own; to come back while the rest of the world keeps moving on, and for just a moment to give thanks to the one who transforms our lives and gives us a home in eternity.

I know there's lots going on...cooking happening, and all that stuff. But for a few minutes on this day, this is what we do: hear a little Bible; sing some songs; and then come forward, and be at this table to give thanks...and in a small way, live out this story ourselves.

There are lots of things in this story we don't know. We don't know for sure whether the other nine lepers are Jews or Samaritans. We don't know whether the other nine understand how they are healed, and we don't know whether the other nine are thankful for their healing. Quite frankly, there's some weird stuff in this story...it's noteworthy, for example, that Jesus gives the ten lepers no word of healing, but that he only tells them to go show themselves to the priests *as if they are already healed*...and that it's while they're walking that they are made whole. Apparently, their faith made each of them well. All ten are healed.

There are a whole lot of things we don't know. But what we do know is that one of them decides to return to give Jesus thanks. One of them has just got to do it. One of them has just got to make his gratitude real by saying it, and showing it.

There's a truth about how life goes...the least real things are the things we think; when we say them, they become a little more real; but the most real things are the things we act upon; the things we do; the things we literally embody. There's something that happens to us when we live it out...when we live out faith, or mercy, or justice, or gratitude. It's the doing of it that changes us. Each time we live it, it becomes part of us; becomes part of who we are. And instinctively, this healed Samaritan leper—who because he is a leper and because he is a Samaritan is a double loser—knows it...so he comes back, falls down, and says his words, or maybe sings his song.

We are certainly each coming to this day from our own place...some of us, with everything going swimmingly and firing on all cylinders; others, with a hitch in our step, or a heaviness in our hearts. Days like Thanksgiving are the times we may experience the greatest joy and peace. They also may be times when our grief or anxiousness are most piercing. Some of us could tick off the moments of healing without having to think about it. For others, life is such that we wonder more than maybe we'd like to, and have to search a bit harder. We're each in different places, each with different opportunities and challenges this day. And what we all

know is that whether we're at the top of our game or the bottom, the Lord takes us as we are...no need to perform for Jesus.

But however it is we're coming into this day, may it be that the Lord gives us a grace today. May it be the Lord gives us the grace to see the blessings we have been given, and then to let it come out; to find that place where healing and wholeness have been given and received; and to give God thanks; to not just keep walking, but instead to come forward and thank the One who is the source of our being and salvation, and who has given us our very selves.

And if we're not quite sure how to do this Samaritan-esque coming back; if we're not quite sure what that looks like in our life today...let me just remind you that come forward and give thanks in the Lord's presence is exactly what we'll do at this table in just a few minutes. It's what we do every time we're together. We'll each have our own Thanksgiving Day feasts. But together, we'll come forward and have this one.

And if it is that when we come forward to this table, we are looking for something to say, or just something to pray in our own souls, here's a suggestion: "Thank you, Jesus." It's the simplest of prayers, but whether he sang it or whispered it, it's the one this healed Samaritan leper offered; and as this story reveals, it is most assuredly a prayer the Lord honors, not just one Thanksgiving Day, but always.

A blessed Thanksgiving to you, friends.