

Sermon – Luke 17:11-19  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
Thanksgiving – Year A  
23 November 2017

“Where Are You Going?”

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

1. Where are you going on this Thanksgiving Day? You know, after worship, that is. I can't think of Thanksgiving without picturing the journey to the Farm, where my Grandparents Nyhus made their home. We'd hop in the yellow station wagon, vinyl seats crackling with cold and make our way down Highway 41, to State 26. My father would slow the car to a pathetic crawl through the speed traps of Rosendale, only to regain momentum through the snow-dusted, already-harvested cornfields and past the painted barns of southern Wisconsin. Grandma would greet us with lefse and krumkake. We'd play football with our cousins, and would finally be ushered to our final destination – the kids' table, set up in the three-season porch. Of course, Thanksgiving didn't happen in one of those three seasons, and we'd yearn for a different destination, that of the heavy-laden dining room table. It's worth noting that once we graduated to the adult table, we all wished we could go back to the porch, where decorum had no place, but so it goes. Thanksgiving always meant a journey, movement toward turkey and stuffing, toward family and love. Where are you going today?
2. Our Thanksgiving gospel reading is one of journey and movement. Jesus and the disciples are on the move, making the slow trek toward Jerusalem, but they're not the only ones on the road. Coming near to a village, ten lepers approach him, crying out for mercy. But unlike Jesus' purposeful journey, these ten have been wandering aimlessly for goodness knows how long. Cast

off from society, cut off from family, they have nowhere to go. Until they see Jesus and, having heard of his healing power, call out to him. Jesus heals them, but that's not the end of their journey. Jesus sends them to see the priests, and that's exactly what nine of them do. It's tempting, at this point, to start to pile on the nine who go, who fail to return and give thanks, but I have a hard time blaming them. In their joy, who can fault them for going off to see the priests? After all, once the priests have declared them clean, they can travel on – to home, to family, to cranberry sauce and green bean casserole or anything else they'd fancy. But one leper can't go, for he was not simply a leper; he was a Samaritan. The priests in Jerusalem wouldn't have had anything to do with him, nor, likely, he with them. He has nowhere to go, so he makes the most important journey there is, gratefully returning to the Christ who had already come to him in grace.

3. Perhaps we are invited to see ourselves in the person of the one leper, and not the nine, not simply because he is an idealized paragon of gratitude, but because we, like him, have nowhere else to turn. In our brokenness and sinfulness, in moments of heartbreak or aimlessness, in this world shrouded with death and grief – well, where else are we to go? To the One who has come to us with mercy and healing, forgiveness and life. To the One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of our journey through brokenness and death into wholeness and life. To the One who welcomes all of the leftovers to a table heavy laden not with pumpkin pie but with Bread of Life and wine overflowing, his own body and blood given and shed for the healing of this world. For the healing of *you*.
4. In Christ, Paul writes, God has blessed us with abundance, with surpassing grace. It is here, in Christ, that we discover the meaning of gratitude and thanksgiving, for it is here, in Christ, that we are washed surprisingly, stunningly clean, filled with life and graced with faith. In the face of God's own generosity, how can we not come to him, fall down in faith, and rise

again to go, to share, to give? Your faith, friends; your faith in Jesus has made you well. Martin Luther writes, “Not that we or our faith would be worthy of it, but he shows his inexpressible goodness and willing grace, with which he rouses us to believe in him and, comforted, to expect everything good from him with happy and unwavering confidence...You see, then let yourself grasp and feel his grace – yes, it grasps and touch us!”

5. Wherever you find yourself going today after worship, whether it be to hop in the car to visit loved ones, back home to turkey cooking in the oven, to be stuck at the kids’ table or to spend the day alone, you have already made the most important journey. You have come to worship the One who has already come to you. Come, in a few minutes; come to the table of life and share in the feast of great Thanksgiving: Jesus Christ, given for you. And then get up, rise, and go on your way. Your faith has made you well. Go, and make room at your tables and in your hearts, through your faithful living and your cheerful giving, for the modern-day lepers of this world: the poor and downtrodden, the outcast and misfit, the ones with nowhere else to go. You have found the way home or, better, it has found you. Be well in faith, be faithful in love, and thankfully give of the abundance of Jesus. He is always, always, more than enough. Wherever you find yourself today, wherever you are on the journey, he comes to meet you, to raise you up, to heal you, and to send you forth. And that is enough. Amen.

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