

“When Faith Erupts with Gratitude”

Luke 17:11-19

Pentecost 24-A, Nov. 19, 2017

“Desperate times call for desperate measures” is an expression that many of us have no doubt heard, and perhaps even used, at times, throughout our lives!

What this expression means—is that when the problems of life we are facing suddenly become much bigger to us than usual—that this is also when **we will resort to taking much bigger risks than usual in our hopes of solving those problems!**

That phrase: “Desperate times call for desperate measures” actually originated with a very famous **4th Century BC Greek Physician named HIPPOCRATES**, who also gave us his **“Hippocratic Oath.”** Originally, in his practice of medicine, Hippocrates said: **“Desperate diseases call for desperate remedies,”** but you and I get the idea don’t we?

There’s no way that we Americans can **properly celebrate our National Day of Thanksgiving this coming Thursday without our reflecting momentarily, upon the great sense of desperation—**those people we now remember as the **“Puritans”** were experiencing—that prompted them after much prayer and deliberation to board that tiny little ship known as The **Mayflower on the coast of South Hampton, England in September of 1620.**

To a large degree, **this particular group of Christians did come here in their pursuit of religious freedom! Just as reforms were taking place in the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, Switzerland and France,** there were also some Christians in England who wanted to bring about, what they believed, were some much needed reforms within the Church of England. But these men’s efforts were all met with hostility and oppression. Those who challenged the State Church were often jailed and threatened with the death penalty.

Therefore, in **September of 1620, 102 of these Puritans pilgrims boarded that ship named the “Mayflower” because they became convinced that there was a much great degree of religious freedom** that was available to them in the New World; along with the **possibility of their become landowners—**something they would never have become if they remained in their Mother Country.

While their **intended destination in the New World was Virginia their ship unfortunately, was blown, much more northward off its intended course,** so that these pilgrims actually landed in **Massachusetts, some 625 miles north of Virginia,** which mean that they were going to be experiencing much colder winters than they had anticipated.

Their voyage took some 66 days. And because the winter they experienced that year was so severe—the majority of these pilgrims **continued to live aboard the Mayflower** all winter, until it was finally over.

Times were so hard **that only one-half of the Mayflower’s original passengers and crew lived to see their first New England spring.** In March, the remaining settlers moved ashore where they received a most astonishing visit from a Native American who actually greeted them in English.

Several days later, he **returned with another Native American man named Squanto,** who had been kidnapped as a young boy by an English Sea Captain and sold into slavery before escaping to London and returning to his homeland on an exploratory expedition!

It was Squanto who taught the Pilgrims, weakened by malnutrition and illness **how to cultivate corn, extract sap from maple trees, catch fish in the rivers and avoid poisonous plants.** Therefore, it was in November of 1621 that the Pilgrims harvested their first crop of corn, so **that Governor William Bradford organized a celebratory feast, to which many of their Native American allies were also invited.**

You can see quite clearly, therefore, that it was when **these pilgrims harvested their first crop of corn, other grains and vegetables, that their faith then suddenly erupted in gratitude.** Their faith erupted in gratitude with their three-day celebration of a great Thanksgiving Day Feast, upon which they corporately praised the Triune God for his protection and mercy; upon which time they also feasted on some great food so sumptuously together.

Turning our attention to our Gospel lesson this morning, we can also see that desperate times called for some desperate measures in First Century Palestine also, when someone in their family, or in their community, or in their synagogue **contracted the dreadful disease of leprosy.**

I am sure that the **community's response** to a diagnosis of leprosy was **not rooted in a spirit of meanness or in a disposition of hatred** towards those who had contracted the disease. The community's response to leprosy was firmly rooted in **their need for survival.**

And yes, these were **"laws" taught in the Old Testament in Leviticus 13:45-46 and Numbers 5:2-3.** The **fate of the infected person was made even worse by the requirement that he/she be isolated from all healthy people.** They infected person was required to **shout: "Unclean! Unclean!"** when they were approaching or they were approaching a healthy person or a group of healthy people!

It was also required of them—that they **purposefully had to wear some very worn-out and ragged clothing as another outward sign, to others from a distance, that they were lepers. These men were forbidden from wearing hats.** And whenever they would be walking down a road and see another person, or even a group of people coming at them from the opposite direction, while they were still 50 yards away; they had to cry out with respect to themselves; **"Unclean, unclean!"**

Friends, in the story of the TEN Lepers in our Gospel Lesson, when these desperate men saw Jesus in the distance, they knew that desperate times in their lives called for desperate measures in their lives too!

That's when they, **out of their necessity, they set aside all former protocol** and called out to Jesus for help. Their first words to **Jesus were not: "Unclean, unclean!"** but rather, **"Jesus Master, have mercy upon us" (Luke 17:13)!**

These men had also become totally isolated from the community of faith. They could no longer attend worship services in their local synagogues, or in any synagogue, ever again. Instead they were forced into living out their lives of quiet desperation in total isolation from all of their family members and friends who had been so dear to them, up until that time that they were diagnosed as having leprosy from a local priest. Yes, desperate times call for desperate measures and desperate diseases call for desperate remedies.

"When Jesus saw them he said to them: "Go and show yourselves to the priests!"

Jesus said this because the local priest had duties other than leading worship on each Sabbath Day. He was also something of a health official. If a person was miraculously healed of leprosy, it was up to the priest to inspect that person's body, to test for a complete removal of the disease, and to announce the person healed! In such cases, the person would have been cleansed, and at that point it would be fine for a leper to see his wife again, to hold his daughter in his arms again to look for work once again. If the priest gave him the greenlight, he would be pronounced absolutely healed.

When Jesus first told them: *"Go show yourselves to the priests," they must have initially looked down at their bodies. (1) Both hands of one man were still disfigured and mangled. (2) Another man looked at his leg, which still ended with a filthy rag wrapped around his knee. (3) Another must have looked at his skin, and found it just as*

repulsive as it had been for some time now. In other words, at this point, all of these men were still no better off than they had been ten minutes earlier, when they had first spotted this famous teacher.

And yet, they headed off in search of the priests. **“AND AS THEY WENT,” St. Luke tells us, “THEY WERE CLEANSED.”**

ON THEIR WAY, A HAND REAPPEARED AND TINGLED WITH LIFE. A CRUTCH TRIPPED ON FILTHY RAG AS IT FELL TO THE GROUND. THAT LEG WAS NOW BACK, HEALTHY, RESTORED AND COMPLETELY WHOLE.

THE SKIN OF ALL THESE MEN WAS CLEARED UP TOO AND THE TINY HAIRS ON THE TOP OF THEIR FOREARMS TURNED FROM SNOW WHITE TO BROWN AGAIN.

ONE OF THEM LOOKED AT THE OTHER, ANOTHER LOOKED AT THE REST, AND CAN YOU JUST IMAGINE THAT THEY MUST OF ALL STARTED SHOUTING AND SCREAMING OUT LOUD TOGETHER!

“THANK YOU JESUS! GLORY, BE TO GOD ON HIGH!” OR MAYBE EVEN SHOUTED OUT LOUD TO ONE ANOTHER: “HOT DIGGETY-DOG! OR “WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THEM APPLES!”

Suddenly their smiles had now turned into cheering and a sweet madness. They more than likely raced off in the distance, now believing that their nightmare was finally and nearly over!

But for that miracle to happen, these men had to start walking in faith before the circumstances of their lives would change, even one, teeny, tiny bit!

So, my friends, could there be any more important and powerful lesson for us to be thinking about this coming THANKSGIVING DAY?

You and I cannot wait until all of the problems in our lives are solved before we start walking in faith. We cannot put conditions on God! We cannot say: “Lord, as soon as there’s enough money, I will follow your guidelines concerning my life!

We cannot legitimately pray, “*Lord, if you’ll just solve this issue in my family, I will start going back to church!*” Or, “*Lord, when I win the lottery, that’s when I will answer your call upon my life and become much more serious about my Christian stewardship!*” We cannot put conditions on God! Instead, God places a demand for faith on us, before anything at all changes!

“Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks” (Luke 17:17)!

We don’t really know what became of those other nine lepers that were cleansed of their leprosy too, do we? **But our text is very clear in identifying Jesus as the Man who invites us to speculate concerning their whereabouts—is Jesus himself, who asks us, as our living Savior: “Where are the other nine” (Luke 17:17)?** I can’t say for sure about you, but I want to confess to you that throughout so much of my life I have always had a great tendency to hear a tone of judgment and criticism here in Jesus’ voice, as in: “*Where are the other nine! Shouldn’t they have gotten their ungrateful selves over here too!?!?”*

But this past week I couldn’t help but wonder: **What if it was not a tone of judgment and condescension that Jesus had in his voice when he asked this question out loud, in the presence of his disciples, but rather a tone of compassion and of a heartfelt concern that**

marked Jesus' demeanor as he asked this question! Perhaps, Jesus' tone of voice was one that was filled with a much greater tone of mercy than it was with a tone of condemnation and disgust!

What if Jesus' real intention behind his words was: *"Where are the other nine? I was hoping that their physical healing from leprosy was only going to be the first of two great gifts I was hoping to give them on this day?" The gift of God's eternal salvation!*

"RISE AND GO YOUR WAY, YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL..." SAVED YOU, MADE YOU WHOLE! I find this possibility interesting—because certainly also, these other nine men, clearly had some kind of faith in Jesus! After all, they initially called out to him to be healed and they were. Jesus told them, *"Go, and show your selves to the priests"* (Luke 17:14) and they immediately acted upon the command that Jesus had given to them!

They were not healed so long as they just stood there within Jesus' own line of vision; for they would only be healed as they responded to Jesus' command to them in faith; the kind of faith that always moves people to action.

And the next great thing that happened to those ten lepers on that day, Luke tells us, in the next sentence is that it was: *"As they went they were cleansed"* (Luke 17:14)!

I titled this message today: "When Faith Erupts in Gratitude," because I believe that we can look at our expressions of thanksgiving to God—as something this is prompted only by our looking back upon our past blessings—when that faith—actually prompts us also to believe that there are even more blessings that God still has in store out there in front of us—in the future days of our lives as well!"

Friends, I want to close my message today that telling you about a little two year old girl named Sarah; a little two year old girl, like many 2 and 3 year old children, who was extremely active. She was always busy, always moving and always in a hurry—because at 2 years of age she had already realized that there are so many exciting things to do and see and experience in this incredible world God has given to us!

One day Sarah interrupted her playtime just long enough to run into the kitchen in search of a mid-afternoon snack. Hurriedly, she said to her mom: **"Banana, Mom! I want a banana!"**

This is when that exuberant little girl's mother handed Sarah a banana. Sarah quickly grabbed the banana and turned to rush back out of the kitchen. However, before she took very many steps, her mother said: **"Sarah, come back! What are the magic words?"**

Sarah screeched to a halt, turned back around and said, **"Please! Thank you! You're Welcome! God Bless You!" And..."I love you, Mommy!"**

At this point, Sarah got a second banana! And a warm hug!

The magic words Sarah's mother was looking for were: **"Thank You!" She got more than that, but those were the words she was looking for...because Sarah's mother knew how important it is for us to learn how to stop and say thanks!**

THANKSGIVING, GRATITUDE, APPRECIATION...whatever you want to call it...is learned. We don't come into this world as grateful people. We come into this world selfishly screaming out loud our demands.

Now please don't misunderstand me! I love babies. They are absolutely wonderful...one of God's greatest miracles...but anybody who has ever been around a newborn baby knows that all babies come into

our world self-centered and impatient. They come into the world screaming: **“Hold me! Feed me! Burp me! Change me! Rock me! Walk me! Sing to me and do it right now!”**

And that’s okay, because they are babies...and that’s the only way that they can communicate, and actually, in their minds, the only way that they can survive! But as they grow up, and as more time goes by, they will hopefully mature and learn how to be grateful; especially as they are taught by the Holy Spirit of God, through the Bible, and become more like the Lord Jesus Christ himself also, day by day!

I am thankful, today, that at least one of those ten lepers returned to Jesus to say thank you!

I am thankful, today, that when we were all facing the judgment of God upon us because of our sins, that God sent Jesus into this world to save us from our sins and to forgive us our sins—remembering what Dr. Luther tells us about the Lord’s Supper in his Small Catechism: “Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal salvation!”

So friends, when does our faith erupt in gratitude? It’s only when, by the grace of God, we come to realize and recognize the great blessings that the Lord God Almighty pours out upon us in our live!

So friends, when does our faith erupt in gratitude? It’s only when, by the grace of God, we come to realize and rejoice in the great blessings that the Lord God Almighty pours out upon us in our lives too!

A large dog walks into a butcher shop carrying a purse in its mouth. He puts the purse down and sits in front of the meat case. "What is it, boy?" the butcher jokingly asks. "Want to buy some meat?" "Woof!" barks the dog. "Hmm," says the butcher. "What kind? Liver, bacon, steak ..." "Woof!" interrupts the dog.

"And how much steak? Half a pound, one pound..." "Woof!"

The amazed butcher wraps up the meat and finds the money in the dog's purse.

As the dog leaves the butcher decides to follow. The dog enters an apartment house, climbs to the third floor and begins scratching at a door. With that, the door swings open and an angry man starts shouting at the dog. "Stop!" yells the butcher. "He's the most intelligent animal I've ever seen!" "Intelligent?" says the man. "This is the third time this week he's forgotten his key."

The problem with that dog’s owner is that he wasn't thankful! Amen