

Rise and Go with Peace  
Luke 17:11-19

Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday in the United States. It is deeply rooted in the history of the country, in the history of the settlement of the first immigrants. Traditionally, Thanksgiving Sunday has been celebrated before Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving Day is a harvest festival for giving thanks for all God's blessings, often characterized by prayer and feasts. It is a great tradition of the people of the United States. Thanksgiving season is also a time for taking account of the health of our spiritual life, the state of our soul.

We now approach the apex of 2009, the coming Advent season and the close of the year, we look back over the past year. We count the blessings that the last year has brought, and offer thanksgiving to those who have shared lives with us. This time of year is also a time for opening the door to the unknowns of the new year coming with new hope. Advent and Christmas is a turning point in our yearly life.

Did you know that there are Thanksgiving feasts in the Bible? There are three times designated for different Thanksgiving festivals in the Bible for each year. On these days, God commanded the people to bring a sheaf of the harvest.(Leviticus 23:10)

You remember that God commanded the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate three times a year. These three times are the Festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. All three festivals are agricultural harvest Festivals. That means all three Festivals were Thanksgiving Days for the people of Israel. Passover is the festival for the barley harvest. Pentecost is the wheat harvest festival. And Tabernacles is the festival for the fruit harvest. The symbolism of the "harvest" also represents all who would put their faith, trust, and confidence in the Messiah.

The nation of Israel was familiar with the concept of the first fruits or the firstborn. The first fruits were always the choicest, the foremost, the first, the best, and the preeminent of all that was to follow. They were holy to the Lord. Everything on the earth, both man and beast was to be presented before the Lord as first fruits to Him. The first fruits of all the earth were presented to the Lord at his altar in praise and thanksgiving. (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) For the people of God, the Thanksgiving days were the most important days to memorialize in Old Testament times. But, we have only one Thanksgiving Festival in a year.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday I would like to think about our confession of faith, "Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior!" I would like to explore what this confession means to us. And, to consider what we may have to offer, in gratitude to the Lord, as the harvest of our spiritual life in Christ.

Today's Scripture lesson, Luke 17:11-19, shows us how Jesus our Lord met the ten lepers on his way to Jerusalem. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border

between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into the village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priest.” His saying implied that they would soon be cleansed. As they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.

In this story I found some insights, the good news, to share with you today. The first message is that Jesus our Lord comes to meet us.

Who we come across in life may impact the course of our lives as much as anything else in life. Who and when and where we meet people can be a decisive factor in our lives. The people who have made the most impact in our lives—our spouses, teachers, bosses, friends, pastors—all these people, we encountered at some point in our lives. Even more important than all of these encounters, however, is an encounter with Jesus, our savior, in our life.

In the Bible there are many people who met the Lord in an ordinary course of life. Most of those who met the Lord were the blind, the crippled, the deaf, the paralyzed, the devil-possessed, and those who suffer from incurable diseases like leprosy.

Jesus our Lord didn’t avoid the dangerous walk or the filthy road where the suffering people were. One day, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he told his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight?” A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. He was not afraid to walk in dangerous ways.

The area between Samaria and Galilee was known as an unclean and filthy way, where lepers were isolated and gathered to live together. But, Jesus chose this road on the way to Jerusalem to meet ten lepers. Leprosy was a term that covered a variety of ulcerous diseases, some of them curable. The leper was expected to separate himself and to cry out, “Unclean, unclean” as he approached, a warning to others of his condition.

Not until a priest had pronounced him “clean” and he had made the prescribed offerings, could he be readmitted to society. Jesus touched the leper as part of the healer’s technique. Go and show yourself to the priest is a command that is repeated. An offering for cleansing would have to be made by the officiating priest at the temple in Jerusalem.

Where are you living? Are you living in a place of frustration, despair, trouble, pain, sickness, fear or loneliness? Imagine the Lord passing in front of us today, and imagine that you have a chance to meet Him. Then, what shall we do? The Lord is walking in the place of our dangers, our places of filth, shadow, and the valley of our hearts.

Isaiah wrote about the Lord who would like to meet his people, the Lord who eagerly meets them. “Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near,” wrote Isaiah. (Isaiah 55:6)

Secondly, Jesus Christ wants and comes to us, impacting our life which, we call Salvation.

When Jesus was a boy, he went to Nazareth where he had been brought up. At the beginning stage of his ministry, on the Sabbath day, Jesus went to the synagogue in his home town, Nazareth, as was his custom. And he stood up to read the scripture.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus recognized that he came to us not just to heal and forgive our sins, but to impact our life and to offer new life as people of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus met many people who needed to be met by Jesus on the road of their lives. These were often those who were blind, crippled, deaf and the diseased. These people met by Jesus were socially isolated, oppressed by the power of money, and imprisoned by hopelessness. But when they met Jesus, their lives were transformed by the encounter with Jesus.

Paul, Peter, John, James and other disciples also met Jesus on their way through ordinary life and were impacted by Jesus, their lives being transformed. In human history there are many, many people who have met Jesus in their ordinary lives, and even in the deepest valleys of dying, failure, and despair. Wherever they encountered Jesus, there are people whose lives have been transformed, profoundly impacted by Jesus. That is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

However, there are some people who met Jesus and was healed, but whose lives were seemingly not impacted. How do we know who are impacted by Jesus? Jesus asked to the Samaritan who returned to him, “Where not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?” There is a power in gratitude, thankfulness, which opens up our lives to transformation.

The final insight in our scripture lesson is the importance of priorities in life to experience transformation through an encounter with Christ. The right priority is a simple rule for success in life.

We hear from some, “I promise that I’ll have faith sometime in the near future, but not now!” There is a Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-24. A certain honorable man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now

ready.” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.” Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.” Still another said, “I just got married, so I can’t come.” The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

The simple truth of prioritizing is, “Do the first thing first and right now.” Jesus told us to remember that the Kingdom of God is the first priority in life. “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

Here is Jesus’ command and commendation to the Samaritan: “Get up and go on your way. Your faith has made you well.” That is His blessing on the healed leper, “Your faith has made you well.” The fruit of faith is the visible impact on one’s life.

How did Jesus know whether this leper had faith or not? Faith is an attitude rather than a conviction. This Samaritan leper called out with other lepers, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” As Jesus told them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests,” they went and on the way they realized that they were made clean.

Then, this Samaritan leper turned back, praising God with loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. When Jesus saw him returning and prostrating at Jesus’ feet and thanking him, he blessed him and said, “Your faith has made you well.”

It is interesting that we do not often know and recognize the great gift of ordinary life, for which to be thankful, until we have fallen into the deep valleys of tragedy, like bankruptcy, incurable disease, accident, and misfortune. It is foolish to repair the horse barn after the horses have already been lost. Currently, there is an emphasis on preventive medicine in the public debate.

If you are not sure whether the next year will bring victory in your life or not, then thank God now, in advance, for giving you the victory, in faith. In thanksgiving there is power to overcome. Rise and go with peace, Jesus has already provided your way. “Your faith has made you well.”