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## The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 9, 2022

### Generosity Produces Gratitude

God always takes care of his people and sends the blessings they need. Sometimes he does this in quiet and natural ways, but sometimes his gifts are spectacular. In any case, people of faith show their gratitude to God in their thoughts, words, and actions. The Gospel account of the lonely leper illustrates the truth that the Lord's generosity produces our gratitude and then our gratitude experiences more of the Lord's generosity!

#### Sermon

Genesis 8:15-22

**Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it." So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."**

Introduction - So Grandma hands your three-year-old the biggest chocolate chip cookie she's ever seen. Her eyes get as big as saucers, she grabs the cookie, and she takes a great big bite. You have to prompt her a little, "What do you say?" She grins from ear to ear and says, "Thank you, Grandma." And with that, your little girl has taken the first step on the lifelong game of gratitude. If someone gives you something, you say "Thank you." It's the right thing to do.

We say "thank you" to God, too, because we know it's the right thing to do. We get a good report from the doctor and we whisper, "Thank God." The minister reads the Scripture readings and we respond, "Thanks be to God." We finish a meal and we say, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever."

Except that maybe we don't say that, at least not at meals. We're in a rush, the dishes head for the sink and the dishwasher, and "Oh, give thanks" gets forgotten. Why is that? Maybe we got out of the habit or maybe it was a habit we never had. But maybe the problem is more serious. Maybe giving thanks to God is something we don't do nearly enough.

Maybe that's why St. Luke included the story of the ten lepers in his biography of Jesus. You just heard the story: Ten men, all afflicted with an incurable disease that separated them from their families and society until they died leprosy's sickening death. Jesus healed all of them all but only one said "Thank you." Do you remember how Jesus reacted? **Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God?** Was Jesus surprised, was he disappointed? Or was Jesus simply observing the unhappy truth that even believers forget to say "thank you" to God.

Noah wasn't like the nine lepers. Noah did what the lonely leper did: he said "Thank you" to God. We heard about Noah in the First Reading from Genesis 8. He didn't throw himself at Jesus' feet like the leper did; he said thank you in his own way. **Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt**

**offerings on it.** This morning we're going to see why Noah said, "Thank you." And we'll do it with that little table prayer we so often forget to say:

**Oh, give thanks unto the Lord**

For he is good, and his mercy endures forever.

1. You all know that the story of Noah is really the story of the Great Flood. We don't know how much time passed between the creation and the flood, but it was a long time. We don't know how many people lived on the earth back then, but it was a lot of people. And we don't know how wicked those people were, but they must have been really wicked because the Lord decided to destroy them all. Noah was there. He saw the wickedness, he built the ark, he boarded the animals, he watched the rain fall, he heard the springs explode, he felt the ark rise. He heard the rain stop, he felt the ark descend, and then one day he looked out and saw that **the earth was completely dry.**

**Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it." So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.**

Noah was watching while the Creator of the universe restored life on planet earth. The exodus from the ark was planned and orderly: the rodents didn't get stepped on by the pachyderms. No animals died in the ark; there was a male and a female for every species. The pairs of wild animals headed for the wild and reproduced there. The seven pairs of domestic animals were herded together for food and clothing. Noah's three sons and their wives were healthy and able to repopulate the earth. Stop and think what Noah was seeing in all the events before the flood, during the flood, and after the flood. He watched the Creator organize and carry out the most horrific catastrophe in the annals of history and then he watched that same Creator organize and carry out the complete rejuvenation of life on the planet. Noah gave thanks with a sacrifice on an altar. He was alive, spared, saved! But there was more. Noah's eyes told him, his mind told him, and his faith told him that God is good, that he is powerfully good and perfectly good. Noah couldn't help but say "Thank you."

Well, we figure, it was natural for Noah. But what did Noah experience that we have not? Does God still control the beginning of life and the time of death? Have you heard the heartbeat of a baby in an ultrasound or the last breath of a parent? Who do you think plans that? Who gave Hurricane Ian its power? Who makes the roar of Niagara Falls deafening? Do beef and pork and fruits and vegetables keep us alive? Does ice cream taste good? What do we see when we look around us? The strength of the laborer, the precision of the scientist, the patience of the teacher, the dexterity of the pianist, the delight of a child at a chocolate chip cookie. Who do you suppose does that? I'm afraid we are too often like those nine lepers. They saw their skin and their limbs restored, they felt the embrace of their families, they visited their friends in the market place, but they never said "Thank you" to God. What kind of shabby and lazy gratitude is that? To experience God's powerful and personal and perfect goodness day after day after day and then bend no knee or build no altar or speak no prayer! What would Jesus say about us? **Has no one returned to give praise to God?** God, forgive me. God forgive you. Remember how that little prayer goes: ***Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good!***

2. So Noah took some of the domestic animals and sacrificed them to the Lord. The domestic animals—the Bible sometimes calls them clean animals—were the ones that were good for food (like cattle and chickens) and there were seven pairs of those animals in the ark precisely for that reason. Noah and his family could get along without lizards and lions, but they needed the clean animals to live. Noah took some of what he needed the most and offered them to the Lord. And he was doing more than saying thank you. He was expressing his confidence that the Lord would be as good to him in the future as he had been in the past. He was putting himself and his world into the hands of the Lord.

It didn't take the Lord long to prove Noah's confidence right. **The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."** The awesome God was also the merciful Lord. He saw the sin, but he would rule the world with love instead of justice. And with that promise the Lord

created the phenomenon of the rainbow. Still today the rainbow is the sign of the Lord's enduring and eternal protection of life on our planet.

When we say "thank you" to God we're looking into the past and seeing how good God has been. When we say "thank you" to God we're also looking into the future with faith that believes God will be just as good then as he is now. The lonely leper got that right. He knew that sin was a disease worse than leprosy and he believed there was more to Jesus than leper cleansing. He wasn't disappointed. Jesus said, **"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."** The leper came back not to Jesus the healer, but to Jesus the Savior. He threw himself at Jesus' feet to confess his sins. He thanked Jesus to express his faith. And he gained the healing that Jesus came to bring not with a word on a road to some lepers but with his perfect obedience and his innocent death and his resurrection from the grave. The leper's faith didn't heal his leprosy; Jesus healed his leprosy. The leper's faith saved his soul because it connected him to Jesus who gave him life with God forever.

You see how this works, don't you? When we say "thank you" to God we are saying so much more than that we liked the pot roast or the chicken soup. We are saying that the God who is good is also merciful. Of course, God provides pot roasts and chicken soup, but he also provides pardon for our sins and peace with God. He gives us confidence when we pray and courage when we're afraid. He gives us contentment in our life and certainty for our life to come. It's time, friends, to be done with the sinful syndrome of the nine lepers who didn't come back and to become more like the one leper who did. There's no need to get on our knees like the leper or build an altar like Noah or say a table prayer like we used to. But we all need to say, day in and day out, again and again, in our own way and in our own place: ***Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever.*** Amen.