

Day of Thanksgiving – 2022
Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Philippians 4:6-20
Luke 17:11-19

Not all sins are equally easy to hide. It is generally a bad idea to attempt to hide your sins. It is futile, of course, as God sees the heart and everything else besides. Fig leaves didn't get Adam and Eve very far, killing Uriah didn't cover up David's adultery with Bathsheba, and the cock crowing announced to Peter that his sin of denying the Master was well known indeed. Not all sins are equally easy to hide. The alcoholic can hide his booze but he can't hide his problem. Some folks have a temper problem – that's not easy to hide. Some folks are profoundly egocentric. Their patterns of conversation give them away. In olden days, a Hollywood homosexual would hide his orientation by going out, very publicly, with a woman. She was referred to as his "beard," a euphemism for a heterosexual disguise. Humanity will always dream up ways to hide their sins.

What do you suppose is the number one reason for why people lie? To be sure, some folks lie to take advantage of others. Mostly, I think, it's done to hide. Guilt, shame, not wanting to suffer the just repercussions for our misbehavior, not wanting to *change* our misbehavior – that, I would suggest, is the number one reason why folks lie. Is ingratitude a sin? When I was a young father, I attempted to teach my children good manners. There were a whole host of techniques but one repeated exercise was to chirp in their ear: "Say 'thank you.'" How many of y'all have done the same? Sadly, it never occurred to me to ask: "Are you thankful?" I just had them say the words.

How many folks will feign gratitude tomorrow? Is our nation lying to itself? Where will gratitude be directed from the tables across our land? Not every expression of gratitude is equal to every other. The insincere mumbling of thanks by one who has received a gift is not to be compared to the bright-eyed response of one who genuinely recognizes another's generosity. How does one explain that slaves in America thanked God for His goodness to them? How does one explain that the poor widow gave her two copper coins, all she had, drawing Jesus' appreciative attention? How does one explain the apostles rejoicing, after they were beaten, and thanking God that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name? How does one explain the multitude of saints that kneel at this altar with open hands and open mouths to receive Christ's body and blood – Sunday after Sunday?

Gratitude is borne of a keen awareness of the value of the gift that one has received. A callous heart, an ungrateful heart, an unbelieving heart cannot be hidden by an egocentric feast that feigns a virtue that is absent. Jesus tells a parable of about an egocentric chap who starts his prayer this way: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men..." (Luke 18:9). Was this Pharisee thankful? He said that he was. Would God be pleased by an expression of such "gratitude?" I'm thinking not. Not all expressions of gratitude are equal. Jesus expressed gratitude. One could very well say that Jesus lived His entire earthly life as an expression of gratitude. I thank you Father. Those are magnificent words. Those words can be lived as well as said. True God and true man, Jesus *lived* those words. He said them at Lazarus' tomb.

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me” (John 11:41). Lazarus was still dead. The festive table was still bare, so to speak, and Jesus is offering a prayer of thanksgiving.

Have you ever thanked God for the cross that He gives you to bear? Do you believe that God’s good gifts are limited to health, wealth, and a six-cylinder Tesla? (Silly pastor, Teslas don’t have cylinders). Has there ever been a blind man who thanked God, genuinely, for his blindness? Has the cross that God has given you been of benefit to you, saved you from some other more grievous predicament, blessed you in any way? Do you think that God works in such a way as to bless you through pain, adversity? Have you thanked Him for that? One of the prayers my sons and I would pray every night is Luther’s evening prayer. It begins this way: “I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son.” Did we learn gratitude by praying this prayer? The prayer gives thanks for God keeping us this day from harm and danger. Or was the prayer a vehicle for us to express the gratitude that flows from the heart of every believer?

Would you have gone back? As I said, not every sin is as easy to hide as every other sin. Leprosy was impossible to hide. It certainly wasn’t a sin to have leprosy but the folks who had it were often treated like it was. One ole boy went back. He went back like nothing else mattered; not the priests who would certify him as clean, not his family who no doubt would’ve been overjoyed to see him, not his other nine cohorts who were surely elated but not *particularly* interested in going back to Jesus. Would we have gone back? It’s an inapt question, really. Who the heck knows? That day is over; that episode is over. He went back because he knew that it was at that Man’s feet that he had to be; at Jesus’ feet. Jesus was more than the Temple. Jesus was more than the priesthood. Jesus was the embodiment of God’s grace – a commodity so valuable that nothing compares. The leper who returned knew the value of the gift that He had been given. But wasn’t the Giver more important, more enduring and desirable, than the gift? Wasn’t being found in Christ more important than being cured of leprosy?

That day is over, that episode is over, but aren’t you that guy every day? Don’t you have the option – be with the 9 or hang with that guy who went back? Where are those folks who go back? Yep; they’re in the Divine Service. Millions and millions and millions of people go back. That episode is over but it is replayed in a zillion different ways in a zillion different lives and a zillion different people go back. Christianity is knowing that the Giver is more important than any temporal gift that He might see to grant us. When Lazarus came striding out of the tomb, did he render thanks to God for His Son, for the very present Savior who called him out of death? Is that you? To be sure, we live in a good land. “A land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deuteronomy 8:9). Your heavenly Father created you in such a way that you need things for this body and life. He is determined to give them to you. He opens His hand and He satisfies the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16).

The Giver has given you more than what you need to support this body and life. Forgiveness, eternal life, salvation, a home in heaven – the Giver is opening His hand. On the cross the Lord of Creation was pierced with a spike – His hand is open to you. In this present day His love is cradled in a Word that has invaded your heart – His hand is open to you. His gifts have a value that exceeds the wealth of Solomon. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the impetus for the meal

you will partake in on the morrow. Thanksgiving is a feast day, an American tradition, that recognizes that God opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing.

Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? God has opened His hand and given you the fullness of His righteousness. Do you long for peace and hope and joy and love? The Giver shares His life with you and that is precisely what you receive. Are you thankful? There is indeed a great swell of gratitude in this land as believers set aside time to acknowledge God's infinite goodness and His priceless gifts. Believers in every place are the leper who ventured back to the Giver. Believers in every place are Lazarus leaping from his grave and celebrating a life beyond his own. Believers across our glorious land will sit at table and ponder the Giver. The product is a genuine Thanksgiving.