

Thanksgiving – 2025
Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Philippians 4:6-20
Luke 17:11-19

Do you believe that there is a connection, a divinely constructed connection, between gratitude and peace of mind? One of my favorite movies is *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the 2002 version starring Jim Caviezel as Edmund Dantes and Guy Pierce as Fernand Mondego. Fernand is a narcissistic bully from an aristocratic family. Edmund is a humble, aspiring seaman. Mercedes is the beautiful young lass who has known both since childhood. She understands each of them well and has given her heart to Edmund. Fernand is a sulking, brooding loser at love and he attempts to seduce Mercedes despite her fidelity to Edmund. At this juncture she captures the distinction between the two young lads, a distinction that you do well to ponder. Speaking to Fernand alone, Mercedes says: “Remember when we were little kids, and Edmund got that whistle for his birthday and you got a pony? And you were so mad that Edmund was happier with his whistle than you were with your pony.” At this, Fernand’s face turns sour and an exhilarated Edmund approaches to embrace the prized Mercedes.

So, is there a connection between gratitude and joy, gratitude and peace of mind, gratitude and faith, gratitude and love, gratitude and connection to others? Would you rather spend your time with a narcissistic bully or with an individual whose gratitude isn’t a pretense or a formality but a vibrant, integral part of their outlook? The distinction that I’m trying to make is this: giving thanks to God is good and right and ought to flow naturally from faith – we’re in agreement here, yes? But the next level is this: God built us. God built our emotional capacity and our spiritual well-being. He built us “constructively.” Gratitude opens the door to an assortment of other productive emotional and spiritual blessings because that’s how God made us. It isn’t coincidence. It’s not happenstance that gratitude leads to a constellation of other blessings because that is precisely what God designed. Our calling is to recognize it. Our calling is to live it.

Ten lepers are languishing in misery. Their lot is tragic. Leprosy is daily death. Leprosy gnaws at living flesh, turning our biology into a horror show. There was no cure. Social isolation, a radical stigma of uncleanness, and a feeling of being cursed by God, leprosy carried an abundance of trauma. The Son of God ventures into their domain, a village between Samaria and Galilee. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (Luke 17:13). Mercy; how often do you pray for mercy? What is *your* need? What spurs you to cry to God for the gift of His interest, His loving intervention, His divine mercy? It’s difficult not to be aware that one has leprosy. They *knew* their condition. Do you know yours?

Jesus gives them immediate and concrete direction. “Go and show yourselves to the priests” (Luke 17:14). Their condition had excluded them from the worship life of Israel, excluded them from the Divine Service at the Temple. Now Jesus directs them to the priests, directs them to the ones who could verify that they were clean and could reenter the ongoing liturgy at the Temple. Who knows how far they had gotten. Jesus cleanses them as they walked to their destiny. I wish that I could have seen it. I see it in my mind’s eye, but to actually witness what happens next would’ve been a delight of the highest order. One ole boy returns. One fella makes a fuss, a

joyful, exuberant, faithful fuss. Shouting at the top of his lungs, he pitches himself at Jesus' feet. Gratitude oozing out of him like a geyser, like a shaken bottle of champagne that has just had its cork popped.

That is to be our nation, falling at Christ's feet on the morrow, giving thanks to the God who created us, who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16). That one leper is to be our nation – at countless tables, giving thanks to the Lord of the harvest and the Lord of the empty tomb. That one leper is to be you, a child of Thanksgiving. You have celebrated this feast your whole life. With family and friends, with exquisite food and drink that makes glad the heart of man, you have celebrated Thanksgiving your whole life. Look at him. Look at that leper. He's cleansed. He's overwhelmed by the impossible, by the reordering of his life, by a restoration of health. Who would've believed that this could happen? It's miraculous, an obvious sign of something more, something greater, something momentous that is on the horizon and it's all anchored in that man who healed me. Why didn't that Samaritan just keep going with the other nine?

Not everybody falls at the feet of the Lord of the Harvest. There'll be plenty of folks who say that they are thankful tomorrow, but strangely, they will refuse to recognize who it is that deserves their gratitude. Nine go on their way. Nine go on to the priests, or to SoFi Stadium, or to The Look Theater, or Black Friday deals at Ontario Mills. Nine out of ten just keep trucking.

I can't imagine just getting a whistle for my birthday and being happy. I can't imagine getting a pony and not being over the moon with happiness. But I *can* imagine the analogy. Ingratitude is real. Ingratitude turns a heart of flesh into a heart of stone. Ingratitude has its own constellation of attributes – selfishness, pride, arrogance, stubbornness, a lack of empathy, a disinterest in self-giving, a pigpen of dreadful baggage. Who here is loved less by God than any other? Who here has received less of Christ's forgiveness, less of the bounty of His blood than any other? I would suggest to you that malcontents don't know the value of anything. Malcontents hunger and thirst for what lies over the next hill, always pursuing something that they don't have, making those around them miserable as they chase the next thing. Fernand Mondego couldn't abide Edmund's simple joy at receiving a gift. How dark and poor and void is the malcontent's soul!

That one loud Samaritan who threw himself at Jesus' feet – his joy was contagious. I told you that I wish that I could see it because I can picture his joy being poured into my spirit as I observed his reaction to the Lord's mercy, the Lord's cleansing. Gratitude is contagious. Being around grateful Christians elevates my spirit. I know why the leper returned. He thought: "Why should I go show myself to the priests when the One who holds the power of the priests is standing over there, the One who cleansed me, who restored my life, who made me whole?" He is greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6). It may sound austere to your ears, but gratitude that doesn't have the Triune God as the recipient is an empty gesture. Spirit-led gratitude knows exactly where to go, knows exactly who to thank, and enjoys itself while it is doing it. Don't we have a good land? Don't we have a great and glorious and rich and fertile land? Hasn't God provided for us with a remarkable abundance? Every food imaginable, medical advancements of every sort, the abundance of freedom, a secure nation with noble sailors, airmen, soldiers, and marines! Our own Missouri-Synod has the largest Protestant parochial school system in the nation. Our homes are heated in the winter and cooled in the summer – are you grateful?

Our tables will be full tomorrow but we don't live on bread alone. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3). He allowed our forebears to hunger and then He fed them with manna, the supernatural bread of His grace. He fed them tenderly as they made their way to the Promised Land. Christ is our bread. Christ is the bread of life (John 6:48). We feast on Him every Lord's Day. He instills in us a grateful heart. He saw our need. He came into our domain and He sacrificed Himself on the cross to deliver us from the leprosy of our sin. He became the least, became the One who "hungered sore" so that He might feed us with His body and blood (O Love, How Deep – LSB 544). Celebrate that! Give thanks for that! O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever (Psalm 107:1).