

Thankfulness does not come easily to some people. In fact, that's not right. Thankfulness does not come *easily* to anyone. It comes occasionally and with great delay to some people. In the grand scheme of things, we are rarely thankful people.

Because, honestly, we could be – and should be – thankful every waking moment of our lives. Look at Luther's explanation of the first article of the creed:

“I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.”

God gives us *everything*. Right down to our very body and soul. Your very existence is reason for thankfulness. And, instead, we have one day a year. One single, solitary day to remember this. And even this one day only exists by government mandate. Do you think most businesses would close on Thanksgiving if not for it being a federal holiday? I mean, there are going to be a few stores that are open tomorrow even though it is a federal holiday.

We are not naturally thankful people. It's just not in us. It has to be imposed upon us. Shoved into our lives by presidential decree. Encouraged from the pulpit by our pastors. Taught in our catechisms by men like Luther. Exhorted in Scripture by prophets and apostles.

And even then, after all of that, you can't force someone to be thankful. There are plenty of people who will gather around dinner tomorrow without an ounce of gratitude to their God or their neighbor.

Why? Why is thankfulness sometimes so hard? Well, when you think about it, there's a lot that goes in to being thankful. Thankfulness requires contentment. Humility. Peace. Love.

You can't be thankful for what you've been given unless you're content with what you've been given. Greed and covetousness destroy thankfulness.

You can't be thankful for what you've been given unless you're humble enough to recognize the gift that someone gave you. Pride destroys thankfulness.

You can't be thankful for what you've been given unless you're willing to make peace with those offering you a gift. Hate and bitterness destroy thankfulness.

You can't be thankful for what you've been given unless you're willing to love your God and your neighbor. Idolatry and selfishness destroy thankfulness.

Simply put, we're not thankful because we're sinners. So when we see something like Paul's exhortation to Timothy that we make prayers of thanksgiving for ALL people – that we give God thanks even for the government (yikes!) – it can feel rather hopeless to even try. That's not actually the case, though. And the story from our Gospel lesson really spells that out for us.

At the beginning of this story, we have 10 men who, even by God's standards, don't have much to be thankful about. Because they really do have as close to nothing as a living human being can have. Their bodies are literally wasting away. Dying off, piece by piece, with an infection that cannot be cured and will eventually kill them.

On top of that, they are outcasts from society. They are homeless, jobless, and penniless. Forced to live in the wilderness and warn away anyone who comes near. Their only friends are others like them. Which means that every single day, they get to watch their only companions in the world die, one-by-one, as they wait for their own death.

Paul's exhortation to pray and give thanks and live a peaceful, godly life sounds good on paper. But in practice, when a disease is ravaging your flesh and every worldly comfort has been stripped away, it's a little more difficult.

But they pray anyway. *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* That's a prayer. It may sound familiar to you as one you yourself have made from time to time. Even when you weren't in nearly as bad a situation as these 10 men.

Jesus answers their prayer. *"Go and show yourselves to the priests,"* he tells them. *"And as they went they were cleansed."* You see, it was the job of the priests at the temple to determine whether an illness or infection was so severe that it required quarantining a person from the community. Which means these men were healed so fully, even a priest, a person trained to evaluate these diseases, couldn't tell that they had ever been sick.

You know, we talk about times that Jesus raised the dead. Jairus' daughter. The widow of Nain's son. Lazarus. But these 10 men? In a sense, they were raised from the dead too. To them and their families, they were dead men walking. And they're alive again. He doesn't just healing them of their disease. He gives them their lives back.

So we could excuse their lack of thankfulness before. They had almost nothing to be thankful for. Surely, they're thankful now, though?

No, not really. Nine of them just keep walking. They go back to their lives without ever saying another word to Jesus. Only one returns to praise God and give Jesus his thanks.

And you can tell Jesus isn't particularly happy about this. *"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"* Jesus doesn't make these kinds of biting, sarcastic remarks unless he's really irritated. I mean, this is the type of thing he would say about the Pharisees or the chief priests.

Jesus can see the sinfulness in the hearts of these men that destroys their thankfulness. He can see the sin in our hearts that destroys our thankfulness. And he does not like it. Not one bit.

Yet, as critical as those words are, He doesn't use them as a launching point into chastising the other nine. Of taking back His gift or condemning them for their ingratitude. No, the gift is theirs. It's already been given. And Jesus isn't going to take it away.

Instead, He turns to the one who returned and tells him to leave. *"Get up... go. Get out of here."* But then he says those few, oh so important words. *"Your faith has made you well."*

Now, it's easy to read this and think that Jesus is talking about the faith to return and give praise to God for His healing. But that's not what the Bible says. The text says that the ten men were healed as they went along. Long before this guy ever thought to give Jesus his thanks. Which means the faith that healed him was not in the thanks he gave to God after the fact, but the faith to cry out in the first place with his ten friends, *"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*

Here's what it boils down to: these ten men were healed regardless of whether they thanked Jesus. All ten. The other nine ungrateful good-for-nothings? Yeah, them too. They all had faith that Jesus was the one and only person they could turn to for healing. He was their one and only cure for the incurable.

And because of that faith, they were healed. Regardless of how they responded afterwards. Regardless of the sin that destroyed their thankfulness.

We are those ten men. Each one of us, every day of our lives, is one of those men. None of us deserve God's blessing. None of us deserve this life we were given. We approached the Son of God as ungrateful foreigners, plagued by an incurable disease, with nothing to earn us His favor. But in His love, He has healed us. He has raised us from the dead. He has given us our lives back.

Rather than condemn us for our sin. Cast us out of his presence like those men were cast out of their towns. Rather than look into our hearts and demand thanksgiving in exchange for salvation. Jesus simply heals us.

Each one of us, every day of our lives, is one of those men. Every once in a while, like right now in worship or maybe tomorrow around our Thanksgiving feast, we return to God and we give Him the thanks and praise He deserves. And He tells to rise and go and continue in the faith that made us well.

But if we're honest with ourselves, the truth is, nine times out of ten we are ungrateful good-for-nothings. We pray without thankfulness. We receive God's gifts without thankfulness. We take our healing for granted and we move on with our lives without looking back.

And that's wrong. It's an act of ingratitude that deserves God's scorn. In fact, it deserves God's wrath. But once again, we don't get what we deserve. Jesus does not take back the gift He has given us. That life is ours now. No matter our lack of thanks, He does not take His blessing from us. And He never will.

Rise and go. Your faith has made you well. Amen.