

SERMON HARVEST / THANKSGIVING SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11TH 2026

“When It’s Hard to Give Thanks” based on Luke 17:11-19

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Have you ever done something kind for someone, but they did not even say thank you?

Perhaps it was something small. You saw someone walking behind you, so you held the door open for an extra few seconds. Or you noticed that someone had dropped something, so you picked it up and returned it to them. You were not expecting a big celebration or even a long conversation. But perhaps you were expecting two simple words: “Thank you.” And when those words never came, you might have felt a little disappointed. You might even have wondered, “Did they notice what I did? Was it really that difficult to say thank you?”

Of course, we do not do these things simply to receive appreciation. We hold the door open because it is the kind thing to do. We help someone because we see a need. But even when we do not expect anything in return, a little expression of gratitude can mean a great deal.

For those of you who are parents, perhaps this feeling is especially familiar. You may remember the years when your children were growing up under your roof. You gave them your time, maybe even work two or three jobs at the same time to provide for them, and made all kind of sacrifices. You did all these things because you loved them. Yet sometimes, after all that time, effort, and sacrifice, you might have wondered whether they even noticed, because they seldom show their gratitude for what you’ve done for them.

And of course, children and teenagers are not the only ones who forget to say thank you. We all do it. Sometimes we are in a hurry. Sometimes we are distracted. Sometimes we simply forget. But perhaps the most dangerous thing is when we become so accustomed to receiving kindness that we no longer recognize it as something worth giving thanks for.

The title of today's sermon is **“When It's Hard to Give Thanks.”** Whenever the subject of gratitude comes up, one question I often hear is, “How can we give thanks when life is difficult?” And that is a fair question, because we all go through seasons when gratitude does not come easily.

But before we try to answer that question, I want us to pause for a moment and consider something. Perhaps the problem is not always that we have nothing to be thankful for. Perhaps, sometimes, we can’t notice some things we can be grateful for because we focussing only on the hardship before us.

In Christian faith, gratitude is a way of recognizing that our lives are not sustained by our own efforts alone. We receive gifts from God and from one another: the gift of life, the care of family and friends,

the kindness of strangers, and the grace that meets us even when we fall short. Gratitude helps us recognize that, even in the ordinary moments of life, there are gifts we might otherwise take for granted. Of course, I do not want to suggest that giving thanks is easy when we are suffering. Some of us may be facing illness, grieving the loss of someone we love, struggling with loneliness, or going through a difficult season of life. Sometimes, when we are in the middle of that pain, it is hard to see anything beyond what we are experiencing. And we should not have to pretend that everything is fine when it is not.

But maybe gratitude does not mean pretending that our suffering is not real. Perhaps, it means learning to recognize that our suffering is not the whole story. Even in the midst of pain, there may be signs of God's presence: a friend who stays beside us, someone who offers a listening ear, or simply the strength to get through another day when we think we won't be able to. These things do not take away our pain, but they can remind us that we have not been abandoned and that God is still at work, even when we cannot fully see it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his reflections on Christian community, emphasizes the importance of receiving the gifts of others with thanksgiving rather than taking them for granted. Gratitude helps us see the people around us not simply as those who meet our needs, but as people through whom we experience care, generosity, and God's grace. And when we learn to receive these gifts with gratitude, we may also become more attentive to the needs of others.

And yet, gratitude remains a challenge for all of us. Think about how often we turn to God when we need help. We pray when we are sick, asking for healing. We pray when we are afraid, asking for courage. We pray when life becomes overwhelming, asking God to carry us through. And those prayers are important. God welcomes us in our struggles and hears us in our distress.

But what happens when we get better? What happens when the crisis passes, when the fear settles, or when life begins to return to normal? Do we remember to turn back to God, or do we simply continue with our lives as though nothing happened?

Perhaps this is where gratitude becomes more than a feeling. It becomes a choice to pause, to remember, and to turn our attention back to God. And this is precisely what makes today's Gospel story so meaningful. In Luke 17, ten people experience healing, but only one turns back to give thanks to Jesus.

Luke tells us, as Jesus travels toward Jerusalem, he encounters ten people suffering from a skin disease. In the Israelite community, when someone developed leprosy or this particular skin disease, they had to be examined by a priest. If they were declared ceremonially unclean, they had to live separately from the rest of the community, as described in Leviticus 13.

Imagine what that meant for them. They were separated from their families, friends, and neighbours. They could not live their lives as they once did, and they never knew when they might be welcomed

back. Their suffering was not just physical; it was also emotional and social. They lived with loneliness, rejection, and the pain of being separated from the people they loved.

So when Jesus meets these ten people in today's Gospel, he is not simply meeting people who need physical healing. He is meeting people who have been pushed to the margins of society, longing to be healed, restored, and welcomed back into their community.

So when Jesus heals them, imagine what that moment must have meant for them. Their lives had been marked by illness, separation, and uncertainty. Now, they had the opportunity to return to their communities and begin living differently. All ten received the same extraordinary gift.

But, only one of them turns back to give thanks. Luke tells us that the Samaritan “saw that he was healed.” All ten were made clean, but only one stopped, recognized or see what had happened to him, and returned to Jesus to give thanks. Verse 15th say, “One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.”

All ten received the same gift, but only one returned to acknowledge the One who had given it because he saw and notice what happened to him. Perhaps this small details about this Samaritan remind us that sometimes we need to stop and notice what God has done for us.

Christianity has sometimes been described as a particular way of seeing the world, and I think there is truth in that. Robert Barron, a Christian writer and theologian, puts it this way: “Christianity is, above all, a way of seeing.” He explains that when our vision is transformed by faith, it shapes how we pray, how we worship, how we act, and how we live in the world.

And I think we can see this in the Samaritan. He did not simply experience healing and continue on his way. He recognized the gift he had received, turned back toward Jesus, and praised God.

And as Christians, we are invited to see the world through the eyes of faith. This does not mean that God is only at work in the lives of Christians, or that we will always understand what God is doing. Rather, faith helps us recognize God's presence, love, and mercy in the midst of our everyday lives.

Sometimes we see it in the kindness of a friend. Sometimes in the support of our community. Sometimes in the strength God gives us to face another difficult day. The question is not simply whether God is at work in our lives, but whether we are paying attention enough to recognize it. Because when we begin to see our lives through the eyes of faith, even the things we have grown accustomed to can become reasons to give thanks.

So, as you will leave this building and go for your lunch or dinner plan with your families later, I invite you to take a moment and consider these questions: How often do we receive God's gifts without stopping to acknowledge the One who gives them? How often do we pray for God's help but forget to return with thanksgiving? And how often do we become so focused on what comes next that we fail to notice the grace we have already received?

When I was in Sunday school, I remember singing a hymn called *Count Your Blessings*. Some of you might know it. It begins with these words:

*When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

Interestingly, I did not sing this song only at church. I remember my parents reminding me of this song whenever I complained and whined that my friends had the newest video games or went on better holidays than I did. They would remind me to be grateful for what we already had.

Looking back, I realize that my parents were teaching me something important: gratitude does not mean that we have everything we want. It means learning to recognize and appreciate what we have already received.

And perhaps that is something we all need to learn again and again. Because life will not always go the way we hope. There will be days when we feel discouraged, times when we struggle, and moments when giving thanks is the last thing we feel like doing. Gratitude does not mean ignoring our pain or pretending that everything is fine. It means remembering that even in difficult seasons, our struggles do not tell the whole story of our lives, and our pain does not mean that God's grace is absent.

In today's Gospel story, all ten people were healed, but only one returned to Jesus. He stopped, turned around, praised God, and gave thanks. He did not simply receive the gift and move on. He recognized the grace he had received and returned to the One who had given it.

And that is the invitation Jesus offers us today: not simply to count our blessings, but to turn our hearts toward the One who blesses us.

So, friends, this week take a moment each day to notice one thing you are thankful for. It might be a person who cares for you, a moment of joy, the strength to get through a difficult day, or a reminder of God's presence when you need it most. And when you recognize that gift, take a moment to give thanks.

Because gratitude is more than saying the right words. It is learning to recognize God's grace, responding with faith, and allowing that gratitude to shape how we live and how we treat one another. Amen.