**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“He Fell On His Face”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

Thanksgiving Eve, November 27, 2024

*Luke 17: 11-19*

CS Lewis has a little book called *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly On Prayer.* In it, he writes short letters to a fictional friend named Malcolm. He muses on many things in and around prayer. In his 17th letter to “Malcolm,” he writes this about gratitude: “Gratitude exclaims, very properly: "How good of God to give me this." Adoration says: "What must be the quality of that Being whose far-off and momentary coruscations are like this!" One's mind runs back up the sunbeam to the sun.”

Tonight, you have followed the sunbeam to the sun. There is nothing wrong with thankfulness. Thankfulness, or gratitude, is an excellent virtue. Gratitude is something that we ought to cultivate in ourselves and in our children. It’s why so many parents spend so much time reminding their children to say thank you after they have received a gift. It is important to show appreciation for what we have been given.

Although at times, when I think about it, the reason that I sometimes I try to get my children to say thank you, and why at other times we all force a thank you, is not so much for our own sake. I think that oftentimes we say thank you for the sake of the person giving the gift.

At times, we have all over-expressed our gratitude. We haven’t given thanks because it is flowing out of our heart but instead because we want more. Now don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that this is inherently wrong. Many people do this, and there is sin involved for both parties. Some people give gifts in order to be thanked. If they are not thanked, if the proper gratitude isn’t expressed, they won’t give again.

At times, we bring our baggage into our relationship with God. We fall into the trap of believing that if we don’t show our gratitude to God for the things He has given us, He will stop giving. Where the rubber really hits the road is when we start to believe that the closer we follow His commandments, the more we go to church, the better life that we live, the more that God will bless us.

Our reading shows us that whether we are thankful or not, God will bless us. All the Lepers are healed, yet only one returns. Martin Luther expresses the same thought in his explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. “In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.”

God is not after our gratitude. He isn’t like you and me; there isn’t an ulterior motive, He isn’t rewarding you. He gives us our daily bread because He loves and cares for all of His creatures. The problem with gratitude is that it is far too small. God wants more than just our simple gratitude. I’m sure that all of the Lepers were grateful. They would go to the temple to see the priests and offer the right sacrifices of thanksgiving for their healing.

There are many people in America who will express some sort of gratitude tomorrow. Families will gather around the table and someone will give their best shot at a prayer of thanksgiving, which, again, we should all do. The problem is that’s not enough. God doesn’t need a thank you, God needs far more than a thank you.

God needs you. He wants not only your thanks, but as Lewis puts it, He wants your adoration, not just a vague sense of gratitude for your daily bread. God wants you to fall on your face before Him like the man in our reading did. He wants you to submit your entire life to Him. He wants you to look around at all the nice things that you have and measure them up against what you have given to Him and to your neighbor.

God wants your whole life. He wants your life so much that He was willing to give up His life for it. That’s what Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to do in our reading. He was on His way to Jerusalem to die on a cross to take away your sins. Of all the many gifts that God gives us, that, of course, is the thing for which we ought to be the most thankful. Don’t take your gift and run; return to the Lord. Follow the sunbeams to the Son and fall before Him in adoration.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.