

55.4 million people. That's how many Americans AAA forecasts are traveling this Thanksgiving between Wednesday and Sunday. That's about one in every six Americans. Most people, an estimated 49 million, will be on the roads traveling by automobile. But not... turkeys. No, turkeys do not travel by car for thanksgiving. How **do** turkeys travel for thanksgiving? By train. Gravy train, that is! Do you know what turkey's favorite Thanksgiving delicacy is? "Nothing—it's already stuffed." Alright, last one, "What did the **leftover** turkey say?" "Make me a **sandwich!**"

Alright, back to what I was saying about traveling. At thanksgiving, we know **lots** of people travel. And we pray for their safety, through various weather conditions, and other things that can go wrong. Our Gospel lesson for this day of thanksgiving opens up with Jesus, as He was traveling, by foot, with his friends, the disciples, southward toward the Holy City of Jerusalem.

St. Luke tells us they were in an area along the border between Samaria and Galilee. "And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'" (vv 12–13).

In those two verses, we can see the utter seriousness of their situation. First of all, having leprosy wasn't cured by just taking a couple of Advil and getting some rest. As the disease would progress attacking the nerve endings, pain would turn to numbness, and the skin would lose its original color, becoming thick, glossy, and scaly. Sores and ulcers would develop, especially around the eyes and ears, and the skin would bunch up with deep furrows between the swelling so that one's face would look similar to that of a lion—not to mention, one's voice would become hoarse and grating. If you had the signs of this disease and were declared "unclean," you could no longer live in your community, but were basically left homeless without the support of family and friends. You were considered to be cursed by God, profoundly impure. If anyone came near, you had to tear your clothes, cover your upper lip, and cry, "Unclean, unclean!"

So, when Jesus told them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (v 14), that exact, prescribed biblical procedure was necessary in order for them to be declared clean, and as they started on their way, they were cleansed. Yes, they were healed of that awful disease. And it might even be true to say they were healed and freed from a death sentence.

That's why Luke describes in his account how they **all** turned back, praising God, with a loud voice, saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Oh, wait a minute. That's **not** how it happened? Luke **doesn't** describe it that way? No.

Only **one** of the former lepers turned back to praise God and thank Jesus, and that person was a foreigner, a Samaritan, one who was regarded as outside the bounds of the covenant people of Israel. But all ten were cleansed. Their flesh was restored, to be like that of a youth—all of them. They could once again participate in their community. They could have a house and a home and be surrounded by friends and family—all of them. Basically, they could live again—all of them. And yet, only this **one** turned back to say thank you for his physical healing and also to praise God. Yes, the one who turned back even worshiped Jesus as he fell facedown at His feet, giving Him thanks.

On this National Day of Thanksgiving, our living Lord through the Gospel writer Luke also asks us today, “Where is the rest of your congregation, your Christian family? Were not all cleansed by my death and resurrection? Why are not all giving thanks?” And He even says to you who **are** here, “Has your heart **always** been filled with thanksgiving, love, and praise toward me?”

He says, “Didn’t I make you and all creatures? Didn’t I give you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses? Don’t I still take care of them? Haven’t I given you clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all you have? Don’t I richly and daily provide you with all you need to support your body and life? Don’t I also defend you against all danger, guard and protect you from all evil?

“And haven’t I redeemed you, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sins, from death, & from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with my holy, precious blood and with my innocent suffering and death, that you may be my own and live under me in my kingdom and serve me in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as I’m risen from the dead, living and reigning to all eternity?

“And haven’t I called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with my gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith; just as I call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth and keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith? In this Christian Church, won’t I daily and richly forgive all your sins and the sins of all believers and raise you and all the dead, giving eternal life to you and all believers in Christ on the Last Day?” (cf Luther’s Small Catechism, The Creed).

All of this is why we can truly relate to those lepers of Jesus’ day with the same words, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (v 13). And He does. Thanks be to God that He does!

Thanks be to God that He is merciful, patient, and loving toward us—even though we forget at times how much He truly gives us and what He has accomplished for us. Thanks be to God that Jesus willingly went to that cursed

tree, dying and rising for us, so that sin, death, and Satan would have no power over us. Thanks be to God that he continues to prepare our hearts through Word and Sacrament ministry so that angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven will be a reality to us and for us. And yes, thanks be to God that Jesus also had you and me in mind when He said, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well" (v 19). Yes, salvation is truly ours because of Jesus!

See the many reasons to give thanks, all in Christ, to say, "Thank you." To be just like the one leper who turned back to praise Jesus; just like Abraham Lincoln when he solidified a day of thanksgiving as a federal holiday during the Civil War in 1863; just as your parents taught you to say as a child when you received something. We say, "Thank you." But the ultimate reason we Christians give thanks and praise our living God is that He has accomplished our salvation—enabling us now and forevermore to confess personally, "Jesus is also Lord of my life."

So, no matter how far we may have to travel this weekend or throughout our lives, we give thanks that Jesus traveled all the way to the cross and out of the empty tomb to accomplish our salvation. Because of Him, we can indeed enjoy every blessing of body and soul given to us by God the Father, God the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. That's why we are thankful, and that's what makes for a truly happy Thanksgiving. Amen.