

“SERVICE OF PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING  
FOR OUR NATION”

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Galatians 5:1a, 13-14

Luke 17:11-19

Today’s Gospel lesson is one of the saddest passages in all of scripture, because it is a vivid account of something of which all of us are guilty probably far too often – and that is not being thankful. Look at the story – all of these people were healed of a hideous, extremely painful disease, a disease that totally controlled their lives and left them as virtual outsiders in the world. And then, in the blink of an eye, Jesus heals them, they are changed forever – and only one of the ten people even bother to say “thanks” to him.

I don’t think the other nine were necessarily evil people, I just think they got preoccupied, wanting to dive back into life, the life that had been denied them with leprosy. And that’s probably the case with us when we forget to say thanks as well. It’s not that we’re not grateful, it’s just that we’re preoccupied with other things, and we forget.

That’s probably true when it comes to being thankful about our country as well. We have so many, many blessings in this country, but we get busy in life, we get preoccupied and we forget to say thanks. But not today! Today we’re going to remember, and say thanks for the blessings of this country and living in this country.

And we’re going to start this morning by remembering and saying thanks for some of those things that “Take Our Breath Away, Put a Lump in Our Throat, and Bring Tears to Our Eyes.” Oh, the list of those things in our country is enormous, but let me just lift up a few of them.

Sights like The Statue of Liberty lifting high the flame of freedom in New York Harbor. Old Faithful geyser shooting up out of the ground in Yellowstone National Park. The Golden Gate Bridge. The Chesapeake Bay. The Florida Keys.

Music like “Stars and Stripes Forever,” and “Proud to Be an American.”

Things we do that remind us how blessed we are – standing in line to vote in an election, watching a Memorial Day Parade in town, going to Little League games or spending mornings at a soccer field, eating a Phillies Frank at Citizens Bank Park or a Boog Barbecue at Camden Yards. Looking around us and seeing people of

all colors and languages and knowing that we're all Americans – diverse and beautiful.

For all those things, and so very much more, that when we really think about them, do take our breath away, put a lump in our throat, and bring tears to our eyes – we give God thanks.

Let us pray: O Lord our God, you have so richly blessed us in this country, with its beauty, its diverse population, all of the opportunities each of us enjoys. We confess that, too often, like those lepers in the scripture lesson, we forget to say thanks. So accept our gratitude today for all the things that make our country so special. We are indeed blessed, and we thank you and praise you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn, No. 77, "How Great Thou Art" (stanzas 1 and 2)

While there are so many things about our country that bring us joy, there are also many which break our hearts. We're going through a tough time in our country. The opioid crisis is running rampant, and daily we see obituaries of, particularly young people, who have lost their lives because of it.

It breaks our hearts to watch the suffering across our country this year due to flooding. So many communities utterly devastated by rising waters. And other communities wiped out by tornadoes.

The absolute deadlock in Washington pains us all. Bipartisanship seems to be a thing of the past now, replaced by ugliness and vitriol, and nothing getting done. We're better than that, at least we should be. It's not what our founders envisioned.

Hunger is still a huge issue in our country. The latest studies show that 1 in 6 children are hungry. Why a huge percentage of the students at Elkton High School are from families living below the poverty line.

While there may not be physical walls, we still put up walls between us and others – walls of racism, sexism, socio-economic status, nation of birth. We're still struggling to be the nation that is described on the base of the Statue of Liberty – a place for the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

So, for all these things, and other things that break our heart in our nation, let us pray to the Lord.

O Lord our God, we are not a perfect nation. We know that. There is a lot of pain and struggle, we do struggle to be the nation we could be, should be. Pour your Spirit upon us all that we will look to the places of pain in our country and do whatever we can in our own little corner of the world to provide healing and help. Some of the things that break our heart in this country seem out of control, but we know that you are a God through whom all things are possible, so Lord, we put them into your hands and ask you to make a way to wholeness where we can't see it now. For we pray in the name of Jesus, the great healer of us all. Amen.

#### Hymn, No, 3128, Whatever You Do

Friends, we are who we are as a country because of the people who came before us. We remember those who fought at the very beginning for our independence from England, and those who worked together to forge a new nation, and design documents under which we would live. We remember all of our Presidents, those who served in Congress, those who served at every level of government, from Capitol Hill to the smallest town office.

We give thanks for all of the creative people who helped make our country what it is today – inventors, builders, dreamers, musicians, artists, athletes, teachers, doctors – oh, the list goes on and on.

We thank God, especially, for those who have dedicated their lives to keeping us safe – members of the military and first responders of all kind – police, fire, EMT and so many more.

We thank you for our nation's volunteers, who give of their time outside of work, and use the gifts God has given them to make a difference in the world.

Millions and millions of people have given so much of themselves to help make our country what it is today, and for that, we give our thanks and praise.

Let us pray: O Lord our God, our history is filled with the story of brave men and women who have done whatever they could to make our country what it is today. From the founders at the beginning of our new nation, to the millions over the course of our 243 years who have used the gifts you gave them to help make our country strong, we thank you. We would not be the nation we are without their dedication to the United States. Thank you God for these patriots, for their part in bringing us to where we are today as a nation. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

#### Hymn, No. 696, America the Beautiful

We've looked to the past and seen that we could never have gotten to where we are without some pretty wonderful people. And now, we look to the future, and know that it is in the hands of the young who come after us.

We pray for all of the children, youth and young adults of our country. Their world is so very different from the one in which many of us grew up. It's so much more fast paced, it is so electronic, it can be so isolating.

Yet we look around and see so many wonderfully gifted young people, even just right here at the church, and know that the future of our country is in good hands. I watched this week as several of our youth volunteered their time with our Vacation Bible School program. You know, they could have been home playing video games or hanging out with their friends, but instead, they chose service this week.

And what was even more important to me was seeing the admiration the children had for those youth. They flocked to them like bees to honey. They wanted to hang out with them and be friends with them. I remember a number of years ago when Damien was helping with VBS, one of the little boys looked at him and said, "When I grow up, I want to be like you." That's what I was seeing this week – little children looking at these youth with admiration.

The future of our country has yet to be written, but we know it will be in the hands of those who are young today. And from what I can see, I think it's going to be great.

So let us pray for those who will take our country into tomorrow.

God of us all, we pray for all young people today – from the tiniest baby held in a parents' arms all the way to our college students. They are a precious part of our country, and they will lead our country into the future. So guide them all the days of their lives that they will love this country in such a way that they will offer their gifts and their service to make it all that it can be. We entrust the future of our country to them, and we entrust them to your care and keeping. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn, No. 141, Children of the Heavenly Father

Finally today, we pray for peace. We need peace in so many ways. We need peace individually as we live in the midst of too often, chaotic, overly-busy lives. We need peace between us and others as we live in an increasingly divided society with very diverse opinions and, too often, ugly ways of expressing them. We need peace in our government, especially in Washington, where lawmakers will realize they can be better working together, than digging their heels in and not working across

the aisle. And most assuredly, we need peace among nations, where war has become too commonplace, too many lives are lost, and too many threats bandied around almost daily. We need peace, God's peace for ourselves, our country and our world. And so we pray to the Lord for peace.

Almighty God, you sent your Son into the world, the Prince of Peace. He is the source of the peace that passes understanding. We so need peace, especially now in our country. Pour your Spirit upon us as a nation that we might work every day for peace. May we seek to find peace in our personal relationships, in our national life, and in our relationships with countries around the world. We know Lord that that kind of peace starts with us, right where we are, so Lord, make us peacemakers. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn, No. 431, Let There Be Peace on Earth

Prayer –

Gracious and merciful God, we celebrate our nation today and in the days ahead. Thank you for the gift it is to all of us. Thank you for giving us the blessing of living in this land of the free and home of the brave. Cause us to be good citizens of the United States, doing all we can to make our nation stronger and better with each passing day. May we continue to be a beacon to the world, for we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.