WORDS OF WISDOM: I – SAY THANK YOU!

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Independence Day Weekend

Colossians 3:12-17 Luke 17:11-19

Three weeks ago, when I was working on my Father's Day sermon, you might remember that I talked about all of us being able to recall our parents' famous lines they always said to us – lines like "behave yourself" and "many hands make light work." Well, at just about the same time, I was trying to put together my worship plan for the summer, and it suddenly occurred to me that a sermon series based upon words of wisdom might be a fun and interesting thing to do – and voila - today we begin that journey together – considering words of wisdom that we've heard from our parents, grandparents, teachers and others over the years – and what they mean for us today.

And we begin today with one of the very first phrases any of us heard in life – over and over and over again – "say thank you." It's true, isn't it? Even little tiny children just learning to talk, are asked by their parents after they receive something, "what do you say?" And the answer, of course, is "thank you."

We learned to say thank you when somebody handed us something. We learned to say thank you when someone opened a door for us. We learned to say thank you when someone served us in a restaurant or at a store. It was known as common courtesy.

Sadly, somewhere along the way, too many of us started to forget to say thank you. We began to take things for granted, or we meant to say thanks, but we forgot. One person even credits our lack of saying thank you and being grateful to the growing sense of entitlement in our world – "the notion (he says) that I am somehow entitled to things, that I owe no one anything and have no responsibility to anyone. It is a deep self-centeredness that assumes everything is my right, my due, an attitude that replaces concern for the community with a preoccupation with my own needs." (On-line, "Gratitude is More than Saying Thanks," the Rev. John Thomas, 10/10/04)

He might be on to something, we are a world more fixated on entitlement than ever before; but I truly feel that our lack of saying thank you is more an act of forgetfulness or taking things for granted – not that it makes it right, by any means.

All of us have been guilty at one time or another of failing to say thanks. And I daresay that all of us, at one time or another, have been on the other side of the

picture, of not receiving thanks. Now, I know we don't do things just to be thanked, but it sure is nice when someone remembers to say thank you.

I can't tell you the number of times in the past few years that I've given someone a wedding present or a graduation present, and never gotten a thank you note. The first few times that happened, I was shocked, and almost wanted to call them to make sure they got the present. Now, when it happens, I'm not shocked, I'm just sad.

One pastor, in thinking about thankfulness, commented that he "was always taken aback at the end of the Little League season when the cars drove off and no one said thank you for the time I had devoted to coaching their sons." (Ibid) Again – he and I know those parents were grateful, but nobody stopped to say a word to him, they just kept going on the treadmill of their busy, overscheduled lives.

Friends, we're not the first to be guilty of this – it's been going on since time began. Turn to this morning's Gospel lesson, and there's a classic case of forgetting to say thank you. Ten people, who had lived with the terrible burden and pain of being lepers; ten people who had suffered more than we can possibly understand; ten people who not only lived daily with intense physical pain, but also the terrible pain of being isolated from society for fear of the disease; ten people came to Jesus to be healed – and He made it happen.

And only one of them bothered to say thanks. It's hard to imagine how those other nine could have just kept going, and didn't bother to turn back and thank Jesus. I mean, their lives were utterly and completely changed. The intense pain was gone, the intense loneliness would be no more, the agony they had endured for years was gone in the blink of an eye. And they couldn't take even a moment to thank Jesus. So sad.

But friends, before we point the finger at them too much, let's put ourselves in their place for a moment. Imagine, all of a sudden, after years of suffering, after years of isolation, you were made healthy and whole. Imagine how excited you would be to go and see people, and not have them recoil. Imagine how excited you would be to feel good, pain free, for the first time in forever. Imagine the possibilities of new life that would be swimming in front of your eyes. Who among us wouldn't be like them, jumping up on our feet and raring to go, racing into a full and healthy life – not stopping for a moment, not even a minute to say thanks to the One who made it happen? You know what? It's not hard for me to imagine that later on that night, when those nine laid down to sleep, they said their thank you's to the Lord to made it all happen. I mean, these weren't evil people – they were people just like you and me – in the heat of the moment, in the excitement of it all, they just plain forgot.

But there was one who didn't. There was that one leper, that Samaritan, who didn't forget. He turned back, and laid at the feet of Jesus, and poured out his thanks. And, no doubt, it deeply moved Jesus. In spite of his disappointment in the

other nine, this one man's gratitude touched the heart of the Lord. His blessing of the man by healing his leprosy was returned, as He received the blessing of a word of thanks.

When we give God thanks, my friends, for the blessings He gives us, we find ourselves doubly blessed. For as we give Him thanks, just as that Samaritan did, we draw ever closer to Him, and that indeed, is a double blessing. One pastor named David Lose, explains it like this: "Have you ever noticed (he writes) just how powerful it is not only to receive blessing but also to name it and give thanks for it? Maybe you're at dinner with family or friends, and it's one of those meals, prepared with love and served and eaten deliberately, where time just stops for a little while and you're all caught up and bound together by this nearly unfathomable sense of community and joy. And then you lean over to another, or maybe raise your glass in a toast, and say, 'This is great. This time, this meal, you all. Thank you.' And in seeing and giving thanks, the original blessing is somehow multiplied. You've been blessed a second time." (On-line, "Second Blessing," David Lose, 10/7/13)

That Samaritan leper was doubly blessed, when he turned back and gave thanks to Jesus; and so are we, whenever we remember to say thanks for the blessings He pours into our lives. In our crazy busy world, it's so easy to forget to say thanks. It just is. But as people of God, followers of Christ, how much more should we remember to turn back and say thanks?

Maybe we just need to remind each other every once in a while. Maybe we just need to remember how good it feels when someone says thank you to us. And maybe we need to remember the joy it gives to Jesus when we give Him thanks.

I read a little story this week that might just help us remember. There was a man whose family was lovingly cared for by an old woman from the time that man was a little boy until he left to go to college. She was like a part of their family. And she was the one who showed him what a life of gratitude looks like.

He says that every time she sat down at the kitchen table to eat, she would gaze upward and say, "Much obliged Lord, for my vittles." Once, when he was pretty little, he had asked her what "vittles" meant, and she said that they were food and drink. Being pretty savvy, even though he was little, he said to her that she would get her food and drink whether or not she gave thanks, and do you know what she replied? "Yes, we'll get our vittles, but it makes 'em taste better when we're thankful."

And then she told him that an old preacher of hers had taught her, when she was a little girl, to always look for things to be grateful for – so, as soon as she woke up every morning, she would ask herself, 'What is the first thing I can be grateful for today?' Sometimes, it was the aroma of coffee perking, and on those mornings, she would say, "Much obliged Lord, for the coffee; and much obliged, for the smell of it!" (On-line, "Much Obliged," Steve Goodier)

Now, I don't know about you, but I like the idea of, the very first thing in the morning asking "What is the first thing I can be grateful for today?" It might not seem like much, but it might be just the thing to get us into the habit of taking the time to say thanks to Jesus every day.

Oh, my friends, all of us have so much for which to give God thanks and praise. We are so incredibly blessed. Why, just to have gotten out of bed, and made it here to worship in this wonderful place together, is a wonderful blessing!

And most assuredly, this weekend especially, we are having an incredible opportunity to give God thanks for a great blessing in all of our lives – this country in which we live. When's the last time you thanked God for this country? Oh, I hear a lot of criticism and griping and complaining about the country; and I do my best to ignore some of the vitriolic things written about our country and our leaders on the editorial pages of the newspaper and posted all over Facebook.

Despite everything, despite troubles, despite disagreements, despite struggles, the United States is a great country, and we are blessed to be living here. I had to smile the other day – I was in the midst of writing this sermon, and thinking about the blessing that is this country, and I passed by a car whose license plate read "Thank Him." Now, there you go! We live in a country where people can put words of praise and thanksgiving to God on their license plates! It's a great country, where we're free to worship and speak and do so many other things that are denied in other parts of the world.

So, today, since this is almost the first thing in the morning, perhaps the first thing we can be grateful for today is our country. We thank God for "purple mountains majesty and amber waves of grain," for citizens who offer themselves in public service, for men and women who have served and still serve defending our freedom, for workers who stand on assembly lines or in front of classrooms or in a medical office or behind a computer; for music like "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" which stirred us even today, for a spirit that endures even when times are tough and others try to defeat us – oh, the list goes on and on and on – for all of it and so much more we say "Thank you Lord, thank you for this country."

Friends, let us go forth from this place today to be people who never forget to turn back and say thank you. It would sure please our parents, and oh, so much more than that, it will be a blessing to the One who is the source of every blessing in our lives – Jesus Christ our Lord, our Savior and our Friend.

Amen.