

## Thanksgiving 2023, Christ Church, Rev. Mary S. Trainor

Jesus said, “*Where are they?*”

So, happy Thanksgiving, everybody. Thanksgiving is a strange time that has come to be associated with:

- a four-day weekend,
- relatives and friends visiting,
- a big meal
- a football or basketball game,
- a formal kickoff to the holiday season
- black Friday shopping deals.

Along with all of that is the planning and stress of preparations: menus planned, food shopping—we were at Sendick’s yesterday and. Oh my, the crowd—it felt like we were in line for a Taylor Swift concert! Then all the interaction challenges – who will do what? Who will prepare which dish? Who will pick up Aunt Patty at the airport? Who will help control cousin Bill as he passionately brings up his political views at the dinner table? For some of us, Thanksgiving is a time of anxiety. For others, the holidays bring sad memories of loved ones no longer with us. And some of us may be spending Thanksgiving alone (I have). Yes, there can be a lot on our minds at Thanksgiving, perhaps so much so that we can lose sight of what we’re thankful for.

Today’s Gospel is the story of the ten lepers. Their lives were the very essence of hopelessness: living at the very margins of existence with a terminal, painful, disfiguring illness. Because of this illness, they were completely cut off from their families, friends, all society. They were outcasts, scary to others – for good reason due to contagion. (*The antibiotic cure for leprosy was not discovered until the 1940s*) Jesus encounters these ten pathetic people who plead to Him for mercy. They say, “**Jesus, Master, Have mercy upon us.**” What happens next? Well, they go on their way – and while they are on their way – they are cured – completely! “**As they went, they were made clean.**” The leprosy is poof-gone; Jesus cures them! Can you imagine the shock they experienced? And, to be able to rejoin society (which they must have been ecstatic about), they next had to show themselves to the priest, who would authenticate that they are cured and able to be assimilated back into the community. So, they all head out to see the priest but one must have thought – wait a minute – that can wait, first I need to give thanks and praise to Jesus. He throws himself at Jesus’ feet in gratitude, which pleases Jesus –but He also wonders where are the other nine? He said, “*Where are they?*” Of course, Jesus knew and this is a teaching moment – for us and for them. They were overwhelmed with this sudden change of their life situation, so much so that they probably just didn’t think about praise and thanksgiving. They must have been grateful for their miracle cure—but they had a lot of things on their minds.

Like those nine lepers who did not return, we have a lot on our minds. But we have chosen to be here tonight in this holy place to give thanks. We here ARE returning to Jesus to give thanks. I hope this worship service gives you the time and space and quiet to reflect on the specific things you are grateful for. After all, you don't want to be included in the group that Jesus looks out and says, "*Where are they?*" One thing that overarches everything else for which we may give thanks is written at the end of your bulletin tonight, in our Post-communion prayer. We will say it together in a little while: "**Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our savior Jesus Christ.**" Because of God's generous and unconditional love, you've been accepted. Accepted. No entry exams, no grueling interview, no spiritual SATs, no fancy resume needed, in fact, nothing at all is required to find favor from Jesus. You've been accepted. Accepted as living members into the fullness of Christ's love. Whatever else may be going on, no matter what may come or what you may do, you've been accepted—enfolded in the arms of divine love forever. In a few minutes, at this table we will share Eucharist together. That word Eucharist literally means "**thanksgiving.**" Our liturgy of Eucharist is called the Great Thanksgiving. Like that one leper who returned, we are returning to give thanks to Jesus.

Yes, we've got a lot of things on our minds. Maybe we'll overcook the turkey tomorrow, maybe ol' Cousin Bill will make a big scene, maybe you'll have to deal with loneliness. And a million other things, all legitimate concerns. Yeah, maybe all those things will happen. But you and I've been accepted by Jesus. And that's far better even than being cured of leprosy. And as the Post-communion prayer reminds us, we will be fortified and strengthened by this sacrament, by the real presence of Christ within us. And then we are ready to be sent into the world (to the Thanksgiving kitchen and table and beyond) to love and serve—to be instruments of healing in the world. You are accepted as living members of Jesus Christ. That is worthy of great thanksgiving. Amen.