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The nine did nothing wrong.

In fact, the nine were very obedient, doing exactly as Jesus had instructed them to do.

“Go and show yourselves to the priests,” is all Jesus told them to do.

And they did just that....and on their way to do just that, they were healed....which most certainly brought them great joy, and so they hurried on to begin their brand new lives.

Except for that one...

...that one who turns back to thank Jesus.

Again, the other nine did nothing wrong.

In fact, those nine are great examples of faith, since the Bible *does* hold nasty precedent for those who turn back...think of Lot's wife, for

example...the poor salty, creature...So, the nine followed Jesus'

instructions. Perfectly obedient.

But the one turned back to thank Jesus.

And of course that is laudible.

Of course he did a good thing.

Of course this is God-pleasing.

But it calls into question the role of giving thanks to God.

In other words, why do we need to thank God for anything?

After all, we are Lutherans. We believe nothing we do or say—

including saying thank you—can earn God's favor. We don't believe

thanking God will somehow get us on his good side or win us a special spot

in heaven. We don't believe that thanking God secures our eternal salvation

or makes us like those teacher's pets in school we all resented. Saying thank

you to God—whether we mean it or not—has no impact on God’s love for us...God is smarter than that. God will love us even without our thanks.

So, then, *why* give thanks? Why strive to be like that one?

A little story.

The boys and I went shopping for clothes this past week. They are growing at an alarming rate, and it was time to hit Target for some jeans and sweatshirts. So we did just that, and after we were done shopping, as we were all four walking to the car with our cart heaped high...one son turned to me and said, “Mom, thanks for the clothes.”

As we drove home, I thought about this.

All three did not thank me. Indeed, this is something most kids take for granted, and should...the reality that their parents will clothe them. It’s in our job description. We don’t typically expect to be thanked for giving children the things they need—like clothing, food, a bed to sleep in, and so

on. We are used to being thanked for those frivolous things they want, those are the syrupy sweet thank-you's...the ones that reveal to us that we've just been had...

So not all three thanked me, and I did not love the two who did not thank me any less. And I did not even love the one who did any more.

So why then was his "thanks" so meaningful to me?

It was meaningful because giving thanks completes the act of giving.

Giving something to someone and receiving no thanks in return is hurtful, not because the giver necessarily wants the praise...but the giver wants the completion of the act, wants the gratification of having finished the giving of a gift ...in other words, saying "thank you" puts a beautiful period at the end of the sentence. Without it, the sentence is unfinished...

And we don't like unfinished business.

It's why Americans by and large don't like foreign films. We don't like their tendency to simply stop in the middle of the story...a shining example of this is the film rendition of Kafka's "The Castle." Trust me, the ending will make you want to tear your hair out...We like endings to be neat and tidy, tied up with a pretty bow. That's what we want, but that's never how it is.

There's not much in life that can be tied up tidy with a pretty bow. In fact, most things are unfinished...parenting is ongoing and forever unfinished...government is forever ineffective and unfinished...human needs and wants are forever unsatisfied and unfinished...the beds of rivers and coastlines are eternally shifting and forever unfinished...to be sure, the very edges of the universe are eternally expanding, forever unfinished.

So, then, creation is forever shifting and changing and is forever unfinished...as are our lives, forever shifting and changing and forever

unfinished, little things like laundry and bills and big things like relationships and mental health and faith in God, or lack of it. These things are in perpetual motion, ebbing and flowing between times of plenty and times of want; our lives are like those prehistoric plate tectonics, with things forever slamming into each other and at the same time moving far away from each other...and existing like that is altogether exhausting, as you well know.

Can we then rest in nothing?

Can our feet ever be planted firmly on anything, then? Can our hands ever fall idle? Can we ever sleep easy? Will we ever be able to say, “There, then, that’s finished.”

Or are we doomed to live life as if on a balance beam, every muscle tensed and straining, yearning to land, to finish the balancing act of life?

Perhaps God's creation is forever unfinished, even after time as we know it ends with Christ's return, with the beginning of a new age, who knows? But we do know one thing that is finished, and that is God's act of salvation....it is proclaimed from the cross by a dying Jesus, "It is finished!" And he dies in our place and goes to hell in our place and conquers death for us, and, finally, all we can say is, "Thanks be to God," and there is completion, the sentence is ended, life wins, not death, full stop.

"Your faith has saved you," Jesus tells that one who comes back...the Greek is not "your faith has *made you well*," but "your faith *has saved you*..." The faith that in itself is a gift from God saves our soul and makes well all of creation...God would have given us this gift anyway, because he loves us and knows what we need even before we ask for it, but he gives us life, and we say thank you, and there is a collective exhale, and there is completion, and there is rest, for that one who turned back, and for you.