

## Now Thank We All Our God

Sunday, June 21, 2020

Luke 17:11-19

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

### Luke 17:11-19

<sup>11</sup>Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup>As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance <sup>13</sup>and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

<sup>14</sup>When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

<sup>15</sup>One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

<sup>16</sup>He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

<sup>17</sup>Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? <sup>18</sup>Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup>Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

The Thirty Years War raged across Europe from 1618 to 1648. It was Christian vs. Christian, prince vs. prince. The people

caught in the middle of the insanity cried, "How much worse can it get?"

Well, it always got worse. There seemed no end to the relentless bloodshed, exaggerated hatreds, plunder, terror, and chaos. Then came the plague. And a famine. 8 million people died. The German states lost 20% of their population.

Amid this chaos, in the overcrowded, walled town of Eilenberg, Martin Rinkart (1586-1649), a Lutheran minister and accomplished musician, found himself to be as the last clergyman left standing. All the others died or ran away.

Rinkart, alone, remained, scrounging for resources to house and feed the desperate, tending the sick and wounded, calming terrified friends and strangers, burying the dead, comforting those who mourned. Surrounded by suffering, terrified people, Rinkart carried on to the end. There were days when he conducted 40 or 50 burial services, even one for his own wife.

Amid all the horror and death, Rinkart wrote a hymn of exuberant gratitude, *"Now Thank We All Our God."* Rinkart never lost hope, never abandoned the people, never doubted God's goodness. He lived to see the end of the war, dying one year later in 1649, free to go to his well-earned, eternal rest. Now, some of you may be puzzled. How do you thank God when everything is going wrong? How do you sing God's

praises when a [pandemic rages, and racial tensions are high, and cities burn, and necessities are in short supply? Now Thank We All Our God? You must be joking!

Rinkart was not joking. He spent day after day, year after grim year, witnessing relentless, soul crushing misery. But somehow, amid the horror, Rinkart could sing God's praises and write a hymn of thanks for God's "countless gifts of love."

Rinkart knew that gratitude matters. He knew that singing praise and giving thanks to God is especially important when the chips are down, right now, and not in some imagined future when sadness is gone, and the world is at peace.

Perhaps Rinkart knew that cultivating the discipline of a grateful heart would give him the composure and presence of mind to persevere as he served a traumatized people.

Gratitude is a lesson Rinkart may have remembered from the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17: 11-19. After Jesus sent them, healing, on their way, only one, a Samaritan, returned to give thanks. Jesus knew the soul-worth of gratitude and told the grateful one, "Rise and go, you have been made whole."

This is a sentiment echoed in the wisdom of author Anne Lamott, who wrote, "Gratitude, not understanding, is the secret to joy and equanimity."

And what of us? Increasingly, we are witnesses to a world that seems to be coming apart at the seams. Daily, we rush from

task to task, or reel from one crisis to another. We are bewildered by the chaos and cruelty, the senseless suffering, racial injustice and bigotry, walls and wars, and the devastating impact of unchecked greed.

Our world is broken. We yearn to heal it, but don't know where to begin. And we are exhausted. We, ourselves, feel broken, too. We long to be healed, long to be made whole. Wide-eyed and trembling, we do our best to protest wrongs, to work for change, to comfort and help each other remember that the world is still wondrous.

It takes courage to look at life through the lens of gratitude. With our hearts and hands and voices, through our laughter and our tears, we hold hard to an attitude of gratitude, sensing that it is the key to our wholeness. With Pastor Rinkart's bold hymn, we sing thanks to God for countless gifts of love.

Source: Pam McAllister, "What Hymn of Exuberant Gratitude was Written During a Time of Relentless War, Plague, and Famine?", January 16, 2019.

<https://askherabouthymn.com/what-hymn-of-exuberant-gratitude-was-written-during-a-time-of-relentless-war-plague-and-famine/>