PREACHING & TEACHING

Thanksgiving Sermon

A Thanksgiving sermon framework built on Luke 17 and the nine who did not come back. Written for the preacher who has to say something about gratitude that the congregation has not heard nine times already, with the awkward part of the passage left in rather than smoothed over.

22 min preached · 7 segments

Seven movements, twenty-two minutes. The framing and the transitions are written out; the illustrations and the local detail are yours.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Thanksgiving sermons fail by being pleasant. The whole load-bearing move here is movement four, where you name the people in the room for whom this has been a bad year. If you cut that for time, cut something else.
- If you are recording this as an episode rather than preaching it, the Luke 17 reading needs to be slower than feels natural. Ten men, one returns, and listeners who are half-attending will miss the ratio if you rush it.
- Do not list what you are thankful for from the front. It reads as performance and it flattens the room. Ask instead and leave the silence.

01. The hook: the nine

2 min

[open on the ones who did not come back, not the one who did]

Ten men were healed. One came back. We are going to spend most of this morning on the nine.

Because I do not think the nine were bad men. I think they were busy men who had just been handed their lives back, and they went to do the thing you do when you get your life back. They went home.

[optional: one sentence about your own week, something small you received and did not acknowledge]

02. The text

3 min

[read it slowly - the ratio is the point and it goes past people]

[read Luke 17:11-19 aloud, unhurried]

Set the scene. These men lived outside the town by law. Not unwell in the way we mean it, but excluded, required to announce themselves, cut off from family and from worship. Healing did not just mean health. It meant going home, being touched again, being counted again.

And the one who turns back is a Samaritan. The outsider among outsiders. Luke will not let you miss that.

03. The obvious reading

3 min

[say it, because it is true - and then do not stop there]

The obvious reading is the one you have heard: be the one. Be grateful. Say thank you. And that is genuinely in the passage, so say it plainly and do not be embarrassed by it.

[your material, 300 words spoken - what gratitude actually does to a person, kept concrete]

Transition: "But if that is all this passage says, it is a nice sentiment, and I do not think Luke wrote it down for a nice sentiment."

04. The tension: the bad year

4 min

[the load-bearing movement - slow, plain, no fixing]

Here is the difficulty with a Thanksgiving sermon. Some of you have had a year you would not choose to be thankful for. Somebody in this room buried a parent since last Thanksgiving. Somebody lost a job. Somebody is sitting next to a person they are barely speaking to.

[name two or three situations that are actually present in your congregation, without naming people]

And being told to count your blessings when you are in that is not comfort. It is pressure. It asks you to perform a feeling you do not have.

[pause - let it sit, four seconds]

05. The turn: he was still walking

5 min

[this is the claim - do not rush it and do not decorate it]

So look at when the healing happens. Jesus does not touch them. He says go and show yourselves to the priests, and the text says as they went, they were cleansed.

They started walking towards a priest while they were still sick. They obeyed an instruction that made no sense yet. The healing met them on the road, in the middle, before there was anything to be thankful for.

That is the thing I want to leave with the person who has had the bad year. Gratitude here is not a verdict on how the year went. It is something that happens on the road, before the outcome is in.

[your material, 400 words spoken - and one illustration here, only one]

06. Application

3 min

[one thing, and make it doable by somebody having a hard week]

Not a gratitude list. Something smaller and harder: go back to one person this week and say the thing you never said. The nine did not withhold thanks out of malice. They just kept walking.

[your application, 200 words - concrete enough that someone knows by Friday whether they did it]

07. The close

2 min

[come back to the nine - short, then stop]

The nine were healed too. That is the part I keep coming back to. Jesus does not chase them, does not undo it, does not withhold anything. They got their lives back and they went home to live them.

But one of them turned round on the road, and Jesus said something to him he did not say to the others. Your faith has made you well. He already had his skin back. He got something else.

[your one closing sentence, then silence]

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