

- Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength, and our Redeemer, amen. Haven't we all discovered, in our reading, required or desultory, that once in a while, we are jarred by something which hurts, laid hold on by something which will not let us go, until we do something about it. We may frown at it, or we may curse it. We may read it to a long, suffering roommate, or we may write a letter to the editor about it. We may throw the disturbing book or paper into the wastebasket, only to fish it out again, to read the surprising paragraph or sentence once more. In such a situation, a preacher writes a sermon about it. That is how this family came into being, because of a story published in a magazine at the end of last year. Here is the story more or less as printed. "A steamer sank in the lake near Chicago. Only 32 persons were rescued, all women. They were saved because of the efforts of one man who swam back and forth between the shore and the ship, rescuing one passenger on each trip. As a result of exhaustion and exposure, the rescuer had to be taken to hospital where he died six weeks later." For now I quote, verbatim, It is said that between the time when he was taken to the hospital and the day of his death, not one of the 32 persons whom he had saved sent a word of thanks, a flower, or even inquired as to his condition. Now we may rightly say that this is a mellow, dramatic incident, an exceptional occurrence, maybe even a lured overstatement of what actually happened. Even so it is indicative of a not uncommon attitude. Many of us could vouch for its possibility, its probability, even its actuality. We have been on the receiving end of ingratitude. We may, God forgive us, have been on the delivering end. The fact and the fearfulness of ingratitude haunted Shakespeare, judging from his numerous allusions to it. Blow, blow though winter wind though art not so unkind as man's ingratitude. That's an as you like. Or recall these words from Julius Caesar, "For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel. Judge, O you gods, how, dearly Caesar loved him. This was the most unkindest cut of all, for when the noble Caesar saw him stab ingratitude more strong than traitors arms quite vanquished him, then burst his mighty heart." King Lear who had some cause to know, referred to ingratitude as that thou marble-hearted fiend. Well, it's hardly less prevalent in the 20th century, Shakespeare would have a field day with it in our times. Now, what are the symptoms of this disease? The indications of ingratitude in a person, or sometimes it's seen in a general attitude of carelessness, which while meaning well, results in neglectfulness because of putting off til tomorrow, what should be done today. Sometimes it's evidenced in a casualness about what others have a right to expect of a fellow human being. Because one has never learned to discipline, to order his life in relation to others. Again, it may be due to downright thoughtlessness, which leads to discourtesy through the failure to imagine oneself in the place of another. Ingratitude betokens an err of insensibility with regard to others, a want to feeling for others, and insensitiveness to Tom, Dick, and Harry, to Martha, Mary, and Margaret. Small boy scout in a Glasgow tram car once rose and gave a lady his seat. She sat down heavily without any acknowledgement of the useful courtesy. The diminutive scout looked at her and said, "I beg your pardon." The lady answered, "I didn't say anything." "Oh," was the reply, "I thought you said thank you." Now, the boy should properly have been spanked, but the surly female was properly squashed. Ingratitude is a witting or unwitting viking of the hand that feeds one. Now, what's the cause, the radical origin of the disease? It's a self-centeredness which focuses upon the self as the hub of reality. Now, self-preservation is certainly necessary for the ongoing of life. Jesus accepted self-love. But the whole Maurice of

Western civilization stemming from Greece, from Rome, from Palestine, have never individual self survival on this earth as ultimate, as the good. The nation, the state, the race, the family, have claims on the individual, and yet the world owes me, in the singular, a living is a prevalent attitude. Now, search ingratitude is at bottom no casual affair, no mere matter of unmannerliness or social lapse. Shakespeare pierces to its awfulness in 12th night, where Viola says, "I hate ingratitude, more in a man than lying venous, babbling drunkenness, or any taint of vice whose strong corruption inhabits our frail blood." Now, Viola, maybe whimsically, goes to the root of the matter, ingratitude is a sin of the spirit, for is one whole mark of a person who is irreligious. Certainly, non-Christian in everything but output fashion. Now, I think this fact is often overlooked because ingratitude is in external appearance, a sin of omission, rather than one of commission. Yep, it is one expression of self-centeredness, which is the enemy of the Christian faith. Now, what's the remedy? It varies, social pressure, intelligent self-interest, Madison Avenue politeness, humanistic fellow feeling. They can all help us to overcome this fault, but in so far as we look for the remedy in Christian terms, and we must in this chapel, it lies in an understanding of what the Christian faith is all about. Why does a person become a Christian? What makes him that way? What convinces him that the Christian way is the point of view by which he wishes to live? Now, let us forget about tradition, and environment, and happenstance, and dig down to the root. Let us put an answer into one short sentence, and then try to unravel it. Christian behavior is the consequence of gratitude responding to grace. Christian behavior is the consequence of gratitude responding to grace. Now, that at a first hearing, is about as clear as mud, so let's try to clarify it. New Testament writers are unanimous at one point, a Christian is what he is because he wants to make his whole life a thank you to God. Now, that's because of what God has done for him, as it became peaked in Jesus, the Christ. What the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus did was to make evident something that should always have been obvious, God cares for man. He's full of Goodwill toward man. He accepts man as worthwhile, despite all his failings and weaknesses and foolishness. That's what lies behind and within the Parables of The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Boy. All God wants man to believe is that God cares. Oh, God wants man to say his thank you to Him. All God wants man to do is to express that caring attitude toward (indistinct). Now, the realization of this is what changed Paul from a Pharisee legalist who called God sir, into a churchful son who called God Father. Listen to him as he tells the church of Rome what nonplussed him into becoming a Christian. For when we were still in weakness, Christ died in due time for the ungodly. For the ungodly exclamation point. Why a man will hardly die for the just, though one might bring himself to die, if need be, for a good man, but God proves His love for us by this, that Christ died for us when we were still sinners. Why are we grateful to God? Because He first loved us. That's the truth in the old children's hymn, "Count Your Blessings, Name Them One By One, and It Will Surprise You, What The Lord Has Done." But there's also a horizontal dimension, that's the vertical dimension, relationship between God and man, but there's also a horizontal dimension. We express our gratitude to God, not only by loving him, but by loving other human beings also. We love them even when they are not particularly lovely, because God loves us. After all, as Paul pointed out, God loved us when we weren't particularly lovely. One way in which we can show ourselves as Christian is by concern for others, Jesus said so. He made it clear that he wasn't talking about loving our pins folk, our friends, our own kind folk are nice to us. No, you must love your enemies and help them. Then you will have a rich reward, you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind, even to the ungrateful and the evil. And John, commenting on that said, "If anyone declares, "I love God," and yet hates his brother, he is a liar. Now, that's a flat enough statement, isn't it? The horizontal implication and application is graciousness to others, that is the coronary of

gratitude to God. Do you grasp now why Christian behavior is the consequence of gratitude responding to grace? All right, even if that is the remedy, how can we make it work? What's the mode of treatment? How can we help to make this thankfulness, so that will be freed from the sin of ingratitude? Well, first of all, we can show our thankfulness by consciously remembering it in our worship, corporate and private. If it's true, and it is, that confession has an essential part in all prayer. It is also true that Thanksgiving has an equally essential place. Now, this we're conscious of at special time. In late November, we give public thanks for the harvest. In the Church of Scotland, the sacrament of the Lord's supper is always followed in the evening by what is called the Thanksgiving Service. Thanksgiving for the table spread that day for our benefit. And that service in the evening always concludes with a hallelujah chorus. But in all services of public worship, yes, and in the quiet of our own rooms with the door shut, the element of Thanksgiving should not be forgotten. More than that, we should remember others before the throne of grace, that's the reason for the prayer of intercession. If we can just recall these people as individuals, the man who comes to church alone, because his wife is a Roman Catholic. The lady with the aristocratic air and the troubled heart. The boy or girl whose mother is about to undergo surgery in the hospital. Yes, if we recall them as individuals, instead of lumping them all together in a general intercession, we shall more likely consider each with gratitude when we think of them outside of the terms and the times of prayer. It's more difficult to be thoughtless of others if we have shared our grateful remembrance of them with God, who is the author of our thankfulness. And then second, let us act on our gratitude in word and in deed. Oh, with a letter, with a phone call, with a gift, with a visit, an act of kindness may have a chain reaction. It can beget gratitude in us and in others. I happen to have practically no anti-Jewish feeling. Now, why? It's partly tradition. Harry Golden, that false, staffy and Charlotte editor, wrote me recently saying that Scotland is one, if not the one country in the world, which has no history of antisemitism. Jew and Scott joyfully shocked in their wits on each other. You know the definition of perpetual motion. It's a Jew chasing a Scotsman for an overdue account. (congregation laughing) But pen more to the point, I was saved from drowning by a Jewish classmate, with the wonderful name to me of Jackie Paradise. Now, similarly, I seem to have no anti-Negro feeling. My introduction to the Negro in the South was tendered me by a large, colored, truck driver, who changed a wheel on the Chevrolet as my wife and I were coming to settle in Durham. I can still recall my despair somewhere near Lynchburg, as my feeble jack would not raised the overloaded car. And I recall the ease with which the truck driver, with his jack, completed the operation in under 10 minutes. I also remember that he refused any payment. Now, that Jewish classmate and that colored driver may not have been consciously inspired by gratitude to God in their magnanimous response to me, but I was forced back. On an analysis of my own behavior and my motivation as a Christian, love for one's fellows of any race, of any color, is the oil which keeps the machinery of social life from creaking and rusting. Christian commitment behooves us to act in gratitude. It transforms in these capable neighborliness, into conscious brotherhood, by rendering cheerful, willing service to others. These are two ways then, of applying gratitude, responding to grace, vertically, in our prayers, horizontally, in our social behavior. Why was Luke 17:11-19 read as our scripture lesson? The story about how Lord healing 10 lepers, one came back to express his gratitude. And he to add an awkward touch to the story, was not a kosher Jew, but a half breed Samaritan. And Jesus' comment was "When there are 10 men healed, where are the other nine? Is nobody going to turn and praise God for what has been done except this stranger?" It isn't a degree encouraging to know that one out of 10 said thank you. It's also disconcerting to know that only one out of 10 said thank you. That Chicago incident with which this sermon began would have been no surprise to our Lord, though it would have caused him continuing

embarrassment. Amen, let us pray. Oh, might God, our Father, you are full of grace toward the children of men, even when they don't deserve it. Teach us to understand and to accept thy goodwill, in great thankfulness, that our lives may be prayers of thanksgiving to thee, and acts of gratitude to our fellows. Through Jesus Christ, thy word of grace become flesh, even our Lord, and may the blessing of the Lord come upon you abundantly. May it keep you strong and tranquil in the truth of His promises through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (soft music) ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Oh ♪ ♪ Oh ♪