

Sermon for Sunday October 9 – Thanksgiving Sunday
Luke 17:11-17 – Ten Lepers on give thanks.

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Keeping a gratitude journal is all the rage these days. If you are looking for a journal for recording gratitude, then a quick Amazon search would reveal a myriad of choices.

“Start with Gratitude” reads the book whose cover depicts a sunrise.

“Chart your thankfulness” suggests another, offering timetables of one, three, or five minutes per day.

“Good days start with gratitude” proclaims yet another, the statement written in cursive and surrounded by flowers.

For the more digitally inclined folks you can find fillable worksheet or an app to download.

Instruments for cultivating gratitude have boomed in popularity in recent decades, with everyone from Oprah to Pope Francis encouraging us to express our thankfulness. It is supposed to be good for us.

Of course, this is Thanksgiving Sunday a day especially set aside for gratitude. A time to get together with family, roast a Turkey and attempt to make the most vial of vegetables the “Turnip” into something worth eating. Many of us will sit around a table and those gathered, will be instructed by a loving relative to; “say what you are thankful for”. Each person will give thanks for family, a warm home, sparky the dog and no doubt someone will give thanks for those crazy turnips.

All of this so that we remain mindful of all our stuff and perhaps curb our need for more. If we are really lucky we will come to the understand that it isn't the stuff for which we need to be thankful but rather for our

connection to one another, for love and laughter and play and beauty and quiet and health and...and.. and... even God.///

Why do you suppose that one lone Leper, that Samaritan Leper came back to thank Jesus? Jesus had not made a formal “thank you” part of the requirements for healing. Jesus simply told them to go and show themselves to the priests. The Samaritan's nine partners, obviously, felt no need to return. Why the Samaritan?

Perhaps he had a mother who drummed into him the obligation to write thank-you notes for birthday and Christmas gifts. Some of us remember the experience and have made thank-you notes or phone calls a must do in our lives. Clearly, more was at stake in this story than demonstrating polite social etiquette. Why did the Samaritan return?

Part of the answer may be found in the identity of this healed man. He was a leper like the other nine. But, alone among the 10, he was a Samaritan. He was twice scorned, twice rejected, twice removed from the community. As a leper, he was unclean ritually and therefore isolated, he was an object, no doubt, of disgust and fear on the part of his neighbors. As a Samaritan he would have been seen as an outsider-and a despised one at that. Perhaps this Samaritan leper suffered more and thus his healing evoked a more profound gratitude.

The fact is we don't know why he came back. The writer of the Gospel of Luke apparently is not interested in that. Luke may have been more interested in portraying the generosity of God's grace. Generosity that in Jesus, includes his fellow Jews but also includes even those the world defined as unclean, foreign, or impure. Luke seems to be telling us a

story about a daring boundary crossing, daring both on the part of Jesus but also on the part of the Samaritan.

One of the things I noticed in this lesson that I had not noticed before, is the physical position of the Samaritan. When we first see him, he and the other nine approach Jesus but **keep their distance**. None of them moves to break the social conventions surrounding their disease. Yet when the Samaritan returns, he comes close and lies down in humility at Jesus' feet. Among the many things this healing accomplished was the breaching of a formidable boundary and the movement from painful isolation to grateful intimacy. **Maybe that's why the Samaritan came back, not simply because he desired or felt obliged to say thank you but out of a yearning for intimacy with God.** Gratitude – thanks giving is not simply mean the performance of rituals and practices but rather it pulls us deeper into a relationship with God that is intimate, humbling, healing, even dependent.

I wonder if the nine, who wandered off, and didn't return to give thanks were suffering from what seems to be a underlying illness that many of us today still suffer from, which is a deeply ingrained feeling of entitlement, the notion that I am somehow entitled to things, that I owe no one anything and have no responsibility for anyone. It is a deep self-centeredness that assumes everything is my right, my due. An attitude that replaces concern for the community with a preoccupation with my own needs. It enables me to maintain my distance in the illusion of absolute independence. Healed of illness, we wander off like the nine because, after all, we're entitled.

A few weeks ago, I was watching some coverage of Queen Elizabeth's passing and they showed the long lines or "Ques" that folks were standing in – waiting to pay respects. I watched a couple of retirement age make their way through the space where the Queen lay in state and I noticed a man who wore a sweatshirt that said, "I can only be nice to one person a day, and today is not your day. Tomorrow doesn't look too good either." What was he thinking, I wondered. And why did his wife let him get out of the house dressed that way-going to honour a person of life long service. Now, obviously, I know nothing of this man's circumstance in life. But to share in this ritual of respect wearing slogans that declare we owe nothing to anyone, is at best, strange.///

"Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back." Turned back from going his own way, from self-justification, from the protection of distance, and lay at Jesus' feet. And there he proclaimed his ultimate dependence on God. **In the end, gratitude is an expression of our need for others, of our need for God.** Gratitude is what teaches us the truth about our lives. Maybe Mom was on to something more important than just proper etiquette when she drummed into us the importance of writing thank-you notes.

Saying a prayer before meals quietly or with others acknowledges that my life depends on the richness of **God's** creation and a host of people who grew, processed, distributed, prepared, and served the food that gives me nourishment and delight.

Saying a prayer by a hospital bed admits that my health unfolds in the presence of **God's** love as well as the skills of scientists and physicians and nurses and a host of people who maintain these places of care.

And, yes, even sending a thank-you note, as mothers perhaps instinctively knew, is far more than social convention, but rather an awareness that the best gifts – the joys of life are not things we can give ourselves but come from beyond us as an expression of love, even an invitation to love. Each thank you becomes a way to practice gratitude so that more and more our lives are weaned away from the myth of entitlement and the arrogance and isolation of independence. Each thank you becomes a way to practice gratitude so that more and more our lives are shaped by the truth of our belonging to others, and to God.

The healthiest people I know are not the ones who delight in being self-made. The healthiest people I know are those whose lives express a deep gratitude for everything and everyone that has reached across a boundary to enrich and embrace them. For them, dependence is not the dirty word we have sometimes made of it. //

Jesus said, at the end, to the Samaritan, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Luke, I suspect, knew that the healing came from God and not from the Samaritan's belief, but he also knew that to be truly well requires the embrace of heartfelt gratitude.

May we be as wise as the Samaritan today and everyday.

Amen.