

Sermon for October 9 2016

Luke 17:11-19

Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen

Author Anne Lamott has written that her two favorite prayers are “Help me! Help me! Help me!” and “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

Both of these prayers are found in this morning’s Gospel lesson. When ten lepers see Jesus entering their village, they cried out: “Help us! Help us! Help us!” And when all ten were made clean and told to show themselves to the priests, one of them returned, knelt at Jesus’ feet and cried out: “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

To which Jesus responded: “I thought ten were healed. Where are the other nine? Is this Samaritan the only one who has come back to express his gratitude to God?” And then to the Samaritan, he said: “Get up. On your way. Your faith has made you whole.”

It is my contention this morning that Jesus’ parable stands primarily as a word of encouragement for disciples like you and me to grow in our expression of gratitude. This is not earth-shattering news given the fact that this parable is one of the regularly appointed texts for consideration on Thanksgiving Day itself. But giving thanks is not always in vogue...so it’s critical that we be encouraged to express our thankfulness as often as we can.

To be frank, expressions of gratitude are relatively scarce in our culture these days. Our headlines are filled instead with expressions of anger, insult, accusation, lust, complaint, denial and fear. Truth be told, life would be whole lot better if our leaders, the media and yes, even the church, spoke and acted more frequently from a perspective of gratitude and thankfulness. Expressions of gratitude are actually quite counter-cultural and have the potential for pushing back the storm surge of resentment, indignation and polarization which flood our political, religious and social landscape.

I’ve told you before of a long-time friend who always throws me off balance because whenever we see each other and I ask, “How are you?”, he always responds, “I’m grateful.” Despite his on-going battle with cancer and the recent death of his son, my friend has never wavered in his response. It’s always, “I’m grateful!” And whenever he speaks that word, I am blessed, encouraged and in a very real sense made whole.

So here’s the question: Are you grateful? Do you express your gratitude to God with any regularity? Would you like to be a more grateful person?

Well, here's the answer: By God's grace, you can be! You can become a more grateful person! But here's the secret: gratitude takes practice...it becomes easier the more often one expresses it.

One helpful writer has said: "Gratitude, like faith and hope and love and commitment, are not inborn traits that some have and others don't, but rather gratitude is more like a muscle that can be strengthened over time. And as you practice giving thanks and more frequently share your gratitude, you not only grow in gratitude but create an example for others. More than that, you create a climate in which it is easier to be grateful and encourage those around you to see the blessings all around us." (David Lose, "In the Meantime," October 3, 2016)

What's also important to remember is that "practicing gratitude intentionally (not only changes) an individual life (but it also changes) the character of a congregation." Professor Kimberly Bracken Long of Columbia Theological Seminary says: "When Christians practice gratitude, they come to worship not just to 'get something out of it,' but to give thanks and praise to God. Stewardship is transformed from fundraising to the glad gratitude of joyful givers. The mission of the church changes from ethical duty to the work of grateful hands and hearts. Prayer includes not only our intercessions and supplications, but also our thanksgivings at the table."

Well, all of this may already be clear to you, but in light of today's parable from Luke, I wish to strongly encourage you to remember that practicing gratitude is an invitation from God to embrace a different perspective on life...a truly joyful perspective on life. Practicing gratitude opens one up to the beauty of God's creation and the depth of God's compassion. The more you practice gratitude the better you'll feel and the more you'll encourage those around you to be thankful disciples as well.

So, this morning, it's my hope that you will say "I'm grateful!" more often. Not just when someone asks how you're doing, but in all of the nooks and crannies of your life.

That's exactly what singer/poet Carrie Newcomer does in a poem she calls "Three Gratuities." Just listen:

READ POEM

Isn't that lovely!

Well, just to see what you're thinking, let me ask you a question...feel free to respond:

"How are you?" I'm grateful.

"How are you?" I'm grateful.

"How are you?" I'm grateful.

Well then, in the name of Jesus, get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.

AMEN