

Saying Thanks October 10, 2010

Luke 17: 11-17

What is it that you are feeling thankful for this Thanksgiving Sunday? What is it that swells your heart with a deep sense of gratitude? Are you thankful for the season itself: for Autumn in all its glory? The poet Keats described Autumn as the “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness” and there is surely beauty to this time of year that is beyond compare. Everything in Autumn is at its most intense. The colours of Autumn, the reds and yellows and oranges, are rich and deep. The air is crisp and clear. The harvested grains and vegetables and fruits are full of flavour and goodness. And this year, the weather has been particularly splendid.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, what are you thankful for? Are you thankful that we have a municipal election coming up on October 25th, which means that we live in a country where we can vote freely and without fear; that we have a say in who will represent us in government? Or are you thankful that when you break your arm, or get pneumonia, or a lump is discovered in your left breast, that we in Canada have access to the best medical care in the world? Are you thankful that the crash of the markets 2 years ago almost to the day is now 2 years behind us, and that we have survived? Oh, our savings are smaller, but despite the dire predictions at that time, the world has not come to an end. It has gone on. We have gone on. Are you thankful for the opportunities that come our way: for the chance to travel, to cheer for the Maple Leafs, or to seek work that not only pays the bills but also gives meaning to your life? Are you thankful for good art and good books and good movies that we can pay \$10 to see here in Canada (rather than the 12 pounds they pay in England!)? Are you thankful for the Church, and for the privilege it is to be able to worship without fear and to serve in a way that uses your particular talents and gifts? Are you thankful for your friends and your family – for the people you are closest to: the ones you love, the same ones who can sometimes drive you crazy but who are also the ones who- when the chips are down- are there for you, as you are, for them?

What are you thankful for on this Thanksgiving Sunday? And when was the last time-other than today- that you expressed your thankfulness?

In today’s Gospel lesson, we heard the story of 10 lepers who were healed by Jesus. Now, leprosy was- and is- a terrible disease. In Jesus’ time, there was no medical cure for leprosy. Those stricken with the disease suffered terrible disfigurement. And they were completely ostracized from their communities: isolated and shut away into leper colonies. The loneliness and the horror were devastating. And so, when 10 people were healed of leprosy by Jesus, their joy must have been overwhelming. I can picture those who were healed: dancing, leaping in sheer exhilaration. They were healed! They were whole- which meant that they could go home again. They could kiss their spouses, hug their children, pick up the threads of their lives. They could live again! The depth of their gratitude must have been overwhelming. Which is why it is so puzzling that out of the 10 who were healed, only one came back to Jesus to thank Him for what He had done. Only one expressed their gratitude. Only one. How could that be?

A few years ago, a retired teacher who had taught high school English for over 40 years received a note in the mail from a former student thanking him for being such a good teacher. The student told him how inspiring his classes had been and how much the teacher's passion for English had changed her own ability to understand and appreciate and love poetry and literature. The teacher read and re-read the note. Then he wrote a reply. He told the student that it was the first time he had ever been thanked for his work as a teacher. And he told the student that receiving the words of thanks somehow made all the years he had given to teaching worthwhile. I was that student, and I was profoundly moved by my teacher's words. He had been a wonderful teacher! He was loved by his students. How was it possible that he didn't know? And then I realized that we had never told him. We just assumed he knew! It was that simple.

When I think of those 9 lepers who didn't thank Jesus I think of myself- and perhaps of you also- who don't say thanks because we just assume people know how grateful we are for the difference they have made in our lives. We're not ungrateful. We just don't take the time to say "thank you".

Today I'd like to leave you with a challenge. In this morning's bulletin there is a card and an envelope. On the front of the card is the word 'Thanks'. I'd like to invite you to write a note to someone who has blessed your life in one way or another; someone that you just assume knows how much you appreciate them. Today, let's put our assumptions to one side. Let's not just 'feel' our gratitude any longer. It's time to say thanks, for the blessings of our lives.

To God be all glory! Amen

Rev. Patricia Gale-MacDonald
Burton Ave. United Church, Barrie Ont