

St. Paul, MV, 10/12/25

Proper 23C
2 Kings 5:1-3; 7-15c
Psalm 111
2 Timothy 2:8-15
Luke 17: 11-19

*Let us GIVE THANKS to the Lord Our God **It is right to give God thanks and praise.** . .*
familiar words. . . The opening of our Eucharistic Prayer, or The Great Thanksgiving. We pray those words every week, and they often ***well up in us...and call us to a certain way of life*** , one of thankfulness—here and now. ***It is*** Right to give God Thanks and Praise. Indeed, the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship goes further. Their liturgy says, “it is truly right ***and our greatest joy.*** . . to give you thanks and praise.” And I would agree – to give thanks is joy, because in giving thanks, we are acknowledging and then responding to all we have been given – *and that is joy to us.*

Karl Barth, 20th Century Swiss Theologian, was fond of saying that the basic human response to God is gratitude – NOT fear and trembling, NOT guilt and dread, but thanksgiving. Barth said, “What else can we say to what God gives us but to stammer praise?”

The portion of Luke’s gospel that we heard this morning is part of a section in which Jesus is teaching about discipleship. It directly follows the lesson from last week in which the disciples ask Jesus for more faith, and he told them that they had all the faith they needed. In fact, they had enough to do just about anything they wanted to do, including moving that mulberry bush. Following that, they continued traveling, and today’s gospel picks them up closer to Jerusalem, passing along between Samaria and Galilee. It’s important to remember that in the gospels, Samaria is *always* perceived as a hostile, foreign

place, and its inhabitants are always seen as foreigners, a despised group, and thought to be culturally inferior. That is how the culture of the day saw them, but Jesus often used that unfortunate belief to teach...telling parables such as “the Good Samaritan.” On top of that, we hear in this lesson of leprosy, a disease that causes further separation between people.

In today’s world we know a good deal about separation – about those who would see others as foreigners, those who don’t belong. And, I don’t know about you, but I long for that ideology to come to an end...we look to the way of Jesus as a guide.

So, there were 10 lepers, who were, by nature of their very contagious disease. . . excluded. We really do not know if what science knows as leprosy today even existed in that first-century Palestine. Some think that Biblical leprosy was more like an acute psoriasis. . . but certainly some sort of pretty contagious skin disease was evident in these ten, and so society’s response was to ostracize those who were afflicted with it. Leprosy was the dreaded disease of Jesus’ day, just, I suppose, as CoViD has been...or coronary disease and cancer are today. We all live in fear of hearing any “C” words used in a diagnosis about ourselves, and that’s just how it was in Jesus’ day with leprosy. Nobody wanted to hear that they had it. Leprosy was not only highly contagious, but it could come in mild or serious forms. When it was mild, it involved red or white blotches on the skin. When it was serious, it could involve disintegration of toes, ankles, feet, fingers, wrists, and hands. Both types were feared, but the tragedy was in the treatment, for when one had leprosy, the treatment was quarantine - something we experienced during the worst part of the CoViD era. Separated from one’s family and friends, the individuals were sent away to live in a leper colony. They would cover their bodies with rags, let their hair grow, and no one could come within twelve feet of them – *extended social distancing*. When a leper went

into a crowd, he or she was required to shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” just to warn folks of their status among them. . . and then everyone would scatter. They would be an untouchable, excluded from society. *Social banning brought about by disease.*

Now, we have learned during CoVid, that we must be careful of contagious disease. . . as we should, but still, consider *how being separated affects us as people*, and, of course, even worse - *intentionally* shutting people out because of other factors – their nationality, for instance. This is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus. Exclusion has negative effects on humans. We need to be in connection with other humans to be healthy and whole, and, as our baptismal vows call us to do, we must do our darnedest to **include** all others.

The ten lepers called to Jesus and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” His response, puzzles us some. . . “Go show yourselves to the priests.” Now, I had lots of classes during both my undergraduate and seminary years, but not one of them covered the topic of leprosy, its identification and/or treatment. . . And I’m glad to say, both for me and the one suffering, that I have never been sent one leper during my time as a priest! **But** the priest’s job, during Jesus’ time, was to pronounce and certify that the rare *healed* lepers were ready to re-enter society. Additionally, the cleric’s job was to prescribe ritual cleansing – a part of the healing, which, of course, was not necessary this time, for, *as they went, they were made clean*. Nine of them, continued toward the priest, for his sought-after certification, but one of them, a Samaritan (and because of his disease and nationality. . . was doubly excluded) turned around. . . turned around. . . to come back, give thanks, and praise God. An act of spontaneous thanks giving. Why didn’t the others do the same? Did they feel thanks and praise to the healer?

There is a slight difference between thankfulness and gratitude. Thankfulness is a temporary emotional response to the benefits and blessings received, while gratitude is a deeper, ongoing attitude of appreciation and awareness that persists regardless of circumstances. Thankfulness is an automatic reaction to a specific event whereas gratitude involves cultivating a mindset of appreciation for all aspects of life leading to long-term satisfaction and well-being. We try to teach our children to be thankful. . . and hope that it leads to living a life of gratitude. Like many of your children, my three children heard the phrase, “Make sure you say thank you to ____ for the ____!” or “Did you write a thank you note to ____ for the ____” But that societal expectation of being thanked is not why we teach our children to say thank you. I believe that saying thank you is just a small part of real gratitude. I think that real gratitude is ***a way of life and it is part of our faith. An attitude of gratitude.*** – life lived paying attention to one’s blessings and then praising God and giving thanks for those blessings.

C.S. Lewis, noted British author, explored his newfound faith and commented on scripture’s insistence (especially in the Psalms) that we give praise and thanks to God. Lewis commented on the connection between gratitude and personal well-being when he said, “I noticed how the humblest and at the same time most balanced minds praised most: while cranks, misfits, and malcontents, praised least. Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.”¹

An article on the WebMD website entitled, “Boost your Health with a Dose of Gratitude,” makes the same point, with a bit more evidence. The essay cited thousands of years of philosophic and religious teaching that urged gratitude and then, it cited new

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: G. Bles, 1958), 78-81

evidence that grateful people...people for whom gratitude is a permanent trait, have a health edge. Perhaps grateful people take better care of themselves or are more hopeful, but there is good evidence that gratitude alone is a stress reducer and there are also links between gratitude and the immune system.

Living a life of gratitude seems evident in the Samaritan who was healed. Being grateful wasn't a condition for healing, for all ten lepers, even those who **didn't** return to give thanks, were cured. But, in the turning around, the giving thanks, this one Samaritan demonstrated a faith that cannot and will not be silent in response to what God had done in his life. We can all learn from this.

How do we encourage and practice gratitude? Just being aware is the first step, I think. I hear gratitude from many of you when you talk about this congregation and of your deep thankfulness at having come here, finding it to be such a caring community. I hear gratitude as you look to the future and know that a strong process to find a new rector is in place. I hear gratitude from many of you as you talk about environmental issues and your faithfulness in caring for the creation. Each and every day- good or bad - we can easily find reasons to abide in gratitude. One idea I have used is to keep a daily list of thanksgivings. . . all the reasons one has to give thanks in just one day. Things like: the sound of children's laughter, or dew on the nasturtiums or a conversation with a friend or the sun's rays hitting my bedroom window, or the symphony I just heard on the radio- no great wonders these, but small events that make us thankful lead us to gratitude as a way of life.

We all do, no doubt, recall large, life-giving events that have occurred leaving us grateful. A news story from a few years back is a good example. A Bellevue city councilman, John Chelminiak, was at his vacation home near Lake Wenatchee and decided

to take a late-evening stroll with his dog. During this ordinary evening event, he and a black bear stumbled into each other's space, and, in his words, the bear "launched" himself onto Chelminiak and then wrestled, clawed, and bit him so that within seconds, the councilman was completely disoriented and left fighting for his life. The skirmish left John deeply and potentially fatally wounded, but as I listened to him (in an interview) tell of that night's harrowing events, I was struck with the degree of thankfulness he expressed. John seems to dwell in gratitude. He was thankful for the 911 operators when his wife found him and made the call, for the medics who came quickly to their aid, thankful for the level-headedness of their 11-year old daughter who, having been left behind alone that night when her mom crawled into the ambulance with John, called a friend at home. . . just to talk and to calm herself; thankful for the doctors and care they got at the Wenatchee Hospital; thankful for the airlift pilots and medics and thankful for the extraordinary care he had received at Harborview where he was airlifted.

Now, one could say, *of course he was thankful* (though he did lose an eye and had multiple reconstructive surgeries) But, in the end, he recovered and went home. And, as I listened to him talk, I heard nothing about the pain, or fear, or anger he must have felt at some level. I didn't hear that he thought he was lucky, or that he deserved the healing, or that the bear shouldn't have been there in the first place. He didn't reflect on what seemed to be his very successful life nor his time as a leader in his community and in his church. It might have been easy for one such as John to have an understated sense of right to be there – to walk his dog without being torn apart by a bear, but no. . . he was simply thankful. . . and he planned, at the time of his interview, to return to the cabin and the woods. "It's not something I want to give up. It is a special place, for which I am grateful, and I look forward

to going back.” He understands what God has done in his life, and he’s grateful. He demonstrated, in what he said, that he had nothing to do with the gifts he received that night, except, in gratitude and praise, to receive them.

The basic Christian response to God is gratitude: gratitude for the gift of life, gratitude for the creation, gratitude for the relationships in our lives, gratitude for life, even amidst the bumps that come with it.

Each and every day is filled with reasons to be and to practice gratitude to our God, from whom all things come. “It IS right – and our joy - to give God thanks and praise.” ***May we abide in that gratitude.***