

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

A day devoted to giving thanks is a tremendous gift; a gift not to be wasted or taken lightly. For some, this is a day of football and overindulging. Others will gather at table to argue about politics, or to reminisce about absent family and friends, or maybe to debate the historical roots of the holiday.

As Anglicans, we tend not to focus on the 17th century pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. They were, after all, Reformed Protestants who left the Church of England because they wanted simpler forms of worship and far more strictness in religious discipline.

Instead, the Episcopal church sees Thanksgiving as a feast day, and so we bring out beautiful vestments and celebrate with all the liturgy and ritual of our Catholic roots that would horrify those pilgrims. That's alright. Because instead of looking over our shoulders, we see it as a day to offer ourselves and our gratitude to God.

For some folks, this may seem an odd time to focus on gratitude. Mass shootings are happening almost daily in America. Natural disasters have taken lives and homes around the world. Global and national politics have become increasingly hostile. Even our own local politics here in Burien took a nasty turn for a time. Every day brings news of powerful men mistreating or abusing women or, in some cases, other men.

We could easily conclude that a day of lament or a day devoted to social justice might be a better use of our time. And maybe that's true. Another day. This day devoted to giving thanks is a rare gift of tremendous value. God gives the gift of this day in the midst of all that we cherish, all that is going well and all our joy. God gives this gift in the midst of our anxiety, all our grief or outrage.

There are all kinds of ways to respond to events or situations around us; those that are welcome and those that challenge us. Given the state of our world, there are reasons to express indignation, frustration or alarm. These all color our life experiences and each has a time and a place. Giving voice to these feelings grants them power.

Among them all, the most life-giving response is gratitude. We can choose gratitude. And giving voice to our gratitude multiplies our own blessing because when we recognize God's blessings in our own lives, we are cleansed. That blessing is multiplied when we notice and speak our gratitude for those blessings because that action shares God's abundance with those around us and makes us whole.

In this morning's reading, Luke's Jesus has once again walked into a border area between Judea and Samaria; essentially, the regions that we now call Israel and Palestine. Here, Jesus encounters ten lepers.

They approach him with a plea not for healing, but for mercy. They did not have actual leprosy, or what we call Hansen's disease, which was extremely rare in the biblical Middle East. They had a skin condition, probably psoriasis, that made them ritually unclean according to Torah. Consequently, they were excluded from parts of communal life and deprived of social interaction and participation.

Those may seem minute details, but they matter.

The ten ask for mercy because they hope to be returned to full membership in the community. And so, Jesus instructs them to go and show themselves to the priests who, according to Torah, would examine them to determine whether they were ritually clean or unclean. And, sure enough, as they travelled home, God cleansed them of their affliction.

One of the ten, a Samaritan, realized that his condition had changed and turned back to express his gratitude, falling at Jesus' feet in a posture of worship to give thanks. Now, the other nine didn't do anything wrong. They did exactly as Jesus directed them and God made them clean. I'm guessing that the other nine were happy to be returning to their community, although maybe some of them took the cleansing for granted or were confused. We just don't get to hear how the other nine reacted.

What we do get to hear is that one Samaritan noticed the change in his situation and decided to express his gratitude to Jesus and to God. All ten made choices that had consequences. The Samaritan recognized that he was cleansed, felt gratitude and then said something about it.

Emotions are powerful and when they are expressed, they become contagious and when deeply held emotions are expressed, they can spread like an epidemic. Witness the way that racial hatred has been enflamed in the last year. Fortunately, we can also choose to transmit forgiveness, mercy and compassion.

And gratitude – gratitude may be the queen of all powerful emotions. Gratitude draws us out of ourselves into something larger and more majestic than anything we can imagine. Gratitude unites us with the font of all blessings, refocuses God's light within us and make it useful. Gratitude

loosens the cords of mistakes binding us and inspires us to release the strands we hold of others' guilt.

Gratitude prevents superficial events from deluding us and frees us from whatever holds us back. Frees us even to return to a Jewish rabbi to say thank you from our knees. Even if we are ritually impure foreigners, Samaritans in Judea, who have just realized that we are more than any of that. We are children of God. Beautiful. Whole. And grateful.

Because here's the thing: gratitude is not simply a one-time *choice*, it is a chosen *practice*. Like any other practice, the more we recognize God's blessings around us and give thanks, the more we grow in gratitude and the more of God's abundance is seen and shared by others. The more we practice gratitude, the more we create a microclimate where gratitude thrives and unites us with each other and with the Holy One who pours out blessings all around us.

This day devoted to giving thanks is a tremendous gift. So, find an opportunity to practice recognizing God's blessings and speaking words of gratitude today. Maybe you'll be at dinner later today with family, friends or new acquaintances. Maybe you can find a moment to say something as simple as: "Isn't this is great? I'm glad that we can be here sharing this time and this meal together."

Maybe you'll go for a walk later with a new friend and you'll think about someone dear to you that you no longer get to see. Maybe you'll be inspired to stop for a minute and say: "Thanks for reminding me of her. I wish you could have known her, I think you would have liked each other."

Maybe you'll be heading home later this evening and the rain will be washing over you. Maybe it will remind you of God's promise to rain abundance, prosperity and peace on the earth and on the children of God. Maybe it will move you to say to a companion something like: "This is so beautiful. I'm so glad you're here to share it with me."

Thanksgiving is God's gift of a day to practice gratitude. Gratitude arises from our perception – from our awareness of God's blessing – and it spreads outward as a gift to others as we articulate and give our gratitude expression.

There's no need to draw attention to ourselves or convince anyone or correct them. The words don't have to be eloquent or pious or poetic. Anything we say will be inadequate, but still – *still* – we practice saying *something* because that's how God leads us into wholeness.

Give thanks to God here in this Eucharist, and then go forth into the world as broadcasters of blessing and speakers of appreciation. "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Works consulted:

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