

Proper 23C, St John's Olney, 13 October 2019
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

S.D.G.

*Be joyful in God, all you lands;
sing the glory of his Name;
sing the glory of his praise.*

These are the opening verses of psalm 66, the psalm assigned for today's readings. The psalms are often overlooked in preaching, and in worship. Their message can be hidden in plain sight because the format is not as familiar to us as it would have been to the people of the Biblical era, so our understanding of the message of the psalmist can require more effort than we wish to expend.

Today the choir anthem that is a part of the 10am service also reflects the message of the psalm; *O be joyful in God, all ye lands, O sing praises to the honor of his name, make his praise to be glorious.*

The 66th psalm has three distinct sections, that flow from one to the next; it begins with universal praise of God, then in verses 8-11 speaks of community praise of God, and then concludes with individual thanksgiving and a personal expression of gratitude to God.

The whole of creation is to praise God, our community is to praise God, and we as individuals are to give our thanks and praise. As Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Ephesus; *"give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything"* (5:20).

Recently I have become acutely aware of the importance of the simple phrase - thank you. I have also become acutely aware of the sharpness that comes from the absence of the same simple phrase - thank you. Not hearing these words can cut deeply.

God delights in receiving our praise and thanks; but God does not do what God does because of our praise and thanks. If we are faithless, God remains faithful. If we fail to give praise and thanks, God continues to give love and grace.

But our lives, and the lives of those around us, are so much better when they are permeated with the heart felt words - thank you.

Saint Luke has a way of reminding the world that Jesus' ministry is not just for the chosen people, Israel, but that it includes all people. The story of the Good Samaritan, and here the story of the tenth leper, also a Samaritan, shows the inclusiveness of Jesus' love. This inclusiveness is a powerful message that Saint Luke shares; but as it is with most Gospel stories there is more than one lesson found in the passage. Yes, it is a message of inclusiveness, but there is also a message found in giving thanks and praise.

As Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem, where he will face trial and death, he is approached by ten lepers who, by virtue of their ailment, daily face a death from society. He commands the ten to "Go and show yourselves to the priests" for it is only the local priests who can declare them clean, perform a cleansing ritual, and welcome them back into society. Obediently, they went away and while on the road to the priest they were made clean.

Much has been preached about the nine lepers who did not return, some of it may even be true. What we can assume is that nine of the lepers continued on to their priest, as was the custom, to regain entry into society. We can surmise that they were blinded by the prospect of being made clean, and that their vision was focused on the impending improvement to their own lives, they saw the benefit to themselves. It is possible that after being declared clean by the priest that they did give thanks in the temple; but they did not see Jesus as the one from whom the healing flowed.

It was the Samaritan, the one who would not expect to be healed, the one who even after being made clean would still have been ostracized; it was the Samaritan who gave thanks to Jesus. It was the Samaritan who praised God.

Jesus tells the Samaritan that his faith made him whole. There is a distinction in the Gospels between a medical healing, and a healing of the soul. Words matter, and the

word choices in the original text tells us that all ten of the lepers received a medical healing from the ailment that ostracized them from society. All ten were made clean from the leprosy that kept them on the fringes of society; yet only one was made whole.

The Samaritan alone, was made whole; the Samaritan was reunited with God. “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” The faith of the Samaritan reunited him with God.

Faith and gratitude, praise and thanks, this is the rhythm of being Christian.

During our baptismal service we bring into fellowship with God those who come in faith and baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity, and then we immediately give thanks. We baptize and then immediately say “Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon your servant the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them up to the new life of grace...” The words used to tell the Samaritan to “get up” are the same words used when speaking of resurrection, it is the same implication we share when we say that the newly baptized are raised up to a new life of grace.

We give thanks to God for all things always. Being Christian though is not a solo activity. We can not be Christian by ourselves we are only Christian in community. If we see the face of God in our neighbor, in our sister and our brother, then we should also give them thanks as we give God thanks.

The heart felt words – thank you, have the power to transform lives. The heart felt words – thank you, have the power to welcome the ostracized into community. The heart felt words – thank you, have the power to make someone whole.

Much has been written about gratitude journals and the idea of recognizing those things for which we are thankful. It can be a powerful practice, but I would suggest that it is missing something; it is an internal practice that can be even more powerful when it becomes external. Like the action of the nine lepers, the gratitude journal does not include humbling ourselves at Jesus’ feet and giving thanks and praise. The gratitude journal does not include reaching out to our family, friends, colleagues, and

those who get under our skin, or the stranger on the street so that we can say thank you.

The active role of thanking someone is important. For actions large and small, hearing the words thank you can be life sustaining. I have been the recipient of a small card, business card size, that had two words on it – you matter. Like the words thank you, the message is powerful. Thank you says you matter.

*Be joyful in God, all you lands;
sing the glory of his Name;
sing the glory of his praise.*

Give praise and thanks to God in worship. Give thanks to family, friends, colleagues, strangers, and those who get under our skin because in them we see the face of God.

When asked to describe worship, Martin Luther said “worship is the tenth leper turning back.” *“give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything”*

Amen,