

## ***Gratitude - Our Response to God***

### **Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Luke 17:11-19**

Gratitude...Karl Barth, leading 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's question was, "What else can we say to what God gives us but stammer our praise?"

Another familiar theologian and author wrote as he explored his newfound faith, that the Bible was insistent that we praise and thank God. He also observed the connection between gratitude and personal well-being. "I noticed how the humblest and at the same time most balanced minds praised most: while the crankier, the misfits, and the malcontents praised least. Praise seems to be inner health made audible."

As was stated in an article in Christianity Today, by Brennan Manning, "I believe the real difference in the American Church is not between conservatives and liberals, fundamentalists and charismatics, or Republicans and Democrats. The real difference is between the aware and the unaware. When somebody is aware of the love that God has for Jesus, that person is spontaneously grateful. Cries of thankfulness become the dominant characteristic of the interior life, and the by-product of gratitude is joy. We're not joyful and then become grateful - we are grateful, and that makes us joyful."

In the reading from the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus points to a profound understanding of faith as the 10 lepers are healed. We don't know where the other nine went after they received this tremendous gift of healing. No clues about who they were, though we are told that the one who returned to Jesus was from Samaria. The actual healing in this passage seems to be more a sideline event. Jesus does the healing without fanfare and the nine, we presume, go to show the priest that they are healed, as Jesus told them to. But this Samaritan, the foreigner, the one despised by all the others, comes back to bow down at Jesus' feet, to worship and give thanks for this great gift Jesus gave him.

Gratitude to God is at the heart of this passage - not the actual gift of healing. Jesus asks, "Weren't there 10 who were healed? Where are the other nine? "

Gratitude is at the heart of our worship. When Christians practice gratitude, they/we come to worship not just to get something out of it, but to give thanks and praise to God, and – stewardship to our resources is transformed from fundraising, a pitch by the preacher and the Treasurer for money – to the glad act of gratitude to joyful givers. An attitude of gratitude changes the mission of the church from ethical duty to the work of grateful hands and hearts. An attitude of gratitude changes our prayers from merely intercession so and supplications, lists of what we want, to include and perhaps be focused upon our thanksgivings for all God is doing in our midst.

Knowing these things, "Go on your way, your faith has made you well." Is no longer a problematic statement for we understand that it is a description of a life of blessing for the church: as we go on our way, we rejoice and give thanks; for in giving thanks in all

things, we find that God is in all things. Gratitude is to be shared, and can bless those are und us. During the Great Depression, William Stringer was I a restaurant with friends who were all talking about how terrible things were: suffering people, rich people committing suicide, joblessness. The conversation got more miserable as it went on. A minister in the group interrupted. "In two or three weeks I have to preach a sermon on Thanksgiving Day," he said. "What can I say that's affirmative in a period of world depression like this?" Stringer felt the Spirit of God saying to him, "Why don't you give thanks to those people who have been blessings in your life and affirm them during this terrible time?" He began to think about that in his own life. He remembered a schoolteacher who was very dear to him, a wonderful teacher of poetry and English literature who had gone out of her way to put a great love of literature and verse in him, which had affected all of his writings and his preaching. So he sat down and wrote a letter to this woman, now up in years. It was only a matter of days until he got a reply in the feeble scrawl of the aged.

*My Dear Willy,*

*I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small town, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of autumn lingering behind. You'll be interested to know that I taught in school for more than fifty years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has done in many years.*

Stringer said, "I'm not sentimental, but I found myself weeping over that note." Then he thought of a kind bishop, now retired, who had recently faced the death of his wife and was all alone. This bishop had taken a lot of time giving Stringer advice and counsel and love when he first began his ministry. So he sat down and wrote the bishop a note of thanksgiving icing and gratitude. In two days a reply came back.

*My Dear Will,*

*Your letter was so beautiful, so real, that as I sat reading it in my study, tears of gratitude fell from my eyes. Before I realized what I was doing, I rose from my chair and I called my wife's name to share it with her, forgetting that she was gone. You'll never know how much your letter has warmed my spirit. I have been walking around in the glow of your letter all day long.*

Gratitude is sometimes in short supply. However, reasons for gratitude and our ability to share gratitude are abundant. I encourage you each one, to adopt an attitude of gratitude in your daily lives, in your relationship with God, and in the way you approach stewardship. Then you, too, can hear God saying, "Go on your way, your faith has made you well."