

Harvest Thanksgiving 11 October 2020 Luke 17.11-19

Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday. The Autumn leaves are beautiful. The harvest is in. It's so great to be able to purchase local produce at this time of year. When I drive by Chudleigh's there are people out enjoying the apple harvest and travelling around the orchard by hayride. I like to take drives in the country looking for fruit and vegetable stands that farmers set up along the roads. I like being able to buy fresh produce directly from a farmer who grew the crop, tended to it and now has harvested it. I know some people who like to go for hikes and spend time in nature on this holiday weekend enjoying God's creation. I know some of you are closing your cottages this weekend and preparing for the winter that is to come...officially ending your cottage season for the year.

Of course, there is the feast this weekend. There's the turkey, the autumn vegetables, the gravy and the pumpkin pie. Most of us gather with our families for this feast. However, this Thanksgiving is happening during a pandemic and we are being discouraged from meeting in large gatherings as the number of people getting Covid-19 has steadily increased in the past few weeks.

Despite this pandemic there is still much for which to be thankful. We live in a land of plenty. Most of us are food secure meaning that we have a safe

food supply and food is available near to us in grocery stores. For those who are not food secure there are many food banks and agencies such as Covid-Assist Milton who help the poor and the hungry especially at this time of year. We also have public healthcare that will take care of us when we do get sick. We live in a peaceful country. We are not at war with anyone. We live in a democracy where our political leaders are accountable to us. We have the freedom to worship God openly and proclaim our faith. We have technology to help us be together virtually. We are a blessed people. We have family and friends who love us. We all have our own lists of gratitude...people and things for which we are truly thankful. Thanksgiving reminds us to take some time and reflect and give thanks for our blessings. It's a choice we make, a posture we take, this holiday, to be grateful.

Luke's story of Jesus and the Ten Lepers is our gospel this day and it is all about giving thanks. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem when He saw 10 lepers at the edge of a village. He was travelling south from Galilee, through Samaria to Jerusalem. These lepers were not just sick, their disease also made them ritually unclean. They would have been banned from living in the village during their illness. They would not be allowed to participate in village life until the Priest declared they were ritually clean. This meant they lost their livelihoods. They were separated from family and friends and were left to beg

for charity at the edge of town. In Jesus' time, people thought leprosy was contagious; so, nobody wanted to be near a leper. Even Jesus kept physically distanced from them. So, these ten lepers were marginalized and when they recognized Jesus they asked Him for healing. They cried out for mercy.

Jesus has compassion for them and tells them to show themselves to the Priests. We don't know what they thought of this instruction, but they trusted Jesus and headed into the village. While they were on their way they noticed they were made clean. Despite all of them being healed, only one of them realizes it. That one leper realizes that his life has been saved. That one leper connects his healing to Jesus. He knows the gift he has been given by Jesus has changed his life. Jesus has been merciful. Jesus has given him a new life. A chance to rejoin community. An opportunity to live his life with renewed energy and joy. His soul has been revived. He must return thanks for what Jesus has done for him and he does. He goes back to the edge of town to thank Jesus and praise God.

Jesus receives the leper's thanks. Luke makes a point of telling us that the one leper who remembered to thank God was a Samaritan....a foreigner. There was a lot of animosity and prejudice against the Samaritans by the Hebrew people. The Samaritans had a different religion. They were thought to be unclean people and the Hebrew people steered clear of them. Yet in this

story it is a Samaritan who also receives God's blessing and restoration along with the others. Jesus sees all of the lepers are worthy of salvation. He gives His healing grace to all of them. Jesus doesn't pick and choose who to heal. Yet, only the Samaritan understands the enormity of the gift he's received from Jesus. He chooses to be thankful. His faith in Jesus' healing has made him well and he wanted Jesus to know how much he appreciated it.

Today, when we read this passage we define leprosy in broader terms since anyone who led a sinful life was branded as a leper. Whether we understand this passage as one about a physical illness or a metaphor for sin, the point of the story is still the same. Jesus granted them healing. He cleansed them of their sin. They were forgiven whatever sin they had in them that separated them from God. Jesus restored them to life...to normalcy...to family, friends, worship in the Synagogue, and work. Jesus saved them. They had a new life. They received the gift of salvation.

We don't know what happened with the other nine lepers. They may have been over-joyed to be healed. They may have celebrated with family and friends. Perhaps they just took their healing for granted, happy to have gotten something from Jesus the healer as he strolled through their town. Perhaps they were so overwhelmed they could not respond with gratitude. We only

know that one of them chose to respond to the healing with gratitude. One took the opportunity to express his thankfulness.

I remember working with a young woman who when asked ,”How are you?” would respond by saying, “I am blessed.” She didn’t say, “Good” or “Fine” or “Ok”. She always said, “I am blessed.” I discovered she was a practising Christian and had a very deep faith. She said she always wanted to remember that her blessings came from God and wanted to acknowledge her blessings. Therefore, she answered the question, “How are you?” with the words, “I am blessed”. It was a matter of fact in her life and she wanted to state it. Saying it kept her mindful to be grateful and thankful to God for all that she received from God.

When Jesus healed those 10 lepers He was on His way to Jerusalem. On His way to the cross. On His way to bring salvation to the world through His death and resurrection. Maybe the Samaritan leper had an inkling of the sacrifice Jesus would make for him and for all of us when he got to Jerusalem. Maybe the Samaritan had an understanding of the magnitude of the gift of faith and salvation Jesus gave him that day. He was thankful that even a despised foreigner and leper like himself was still the recipient of God’s saving grace. I imagine from that day forward he continued to praise God and give

thanks to God for his blessings and for God's abundant love and when someone asked him, "How are you?", he would have answered, "I am blessed!"

So, despite the difficulties of this pandemic, and there are many, and the anxiety we might be feeling is very real; I invite you to remember that God is with us during this time. Jesus wants to heal us and cleanse us from our fears. Jesus does not want us to be overwhelmed by stress. In the midst of it all is a loving God who gives us hope and the strength to persevere through our challenges....who blesses us even when we don't fully realize it and was willing to sacrifice everything to save us from our sins. Amen.