

Sermon Preached by Pastor Jennifer Rose

October 9, 2016

“Real Gratitude”

Dear friends in Christ: grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A young boy was asked to say the table blessing before the Thanksgiving dinner. He began thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy and Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for each item on the table, the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies and cakes and even the Cool Whip. This was really starting to take a while. Then he paused and everyone waited and waited. After a long silence he looked up at his mother and asked, “If I thank God for the broccoli, won’t God know that I’m lying?”

Most of us are aware of how important attitude is to our lives. Someone with a bad attitude can infect a whole group and sour what could have been a fun time. It is also true that a joyful, happy attitude can brighten the day for others and everything goes better because of the attitude of one person in the group. We try to teach our children about having a good attitude in hopes that they will help bring others up instead of bringing them down.

Most of us have heard about having the attitude of gratitude and how important that can be but we also know that unless it is from the heart, it just doesn’t work. It is important to be thankful but we know that this needs a certain level of sincerity if it is going to be effective. It is not just something we can just make ourselves feel - but flows out of us when it is true.

Over the years, many people have said very simply that this text is about being thankful. Certainly being thankful is addressed here but I believe there is a greater theme. Rather than thankfulness, I believe the main theme is worship. There is a difference between being thankful for a bunch of things we have and living in the awe and wonder of who God is. Certainly we want to be thankful for all that we have received from God’s hands but more importantly is the touch of grace we have received from our God who has loved us from before time began. Worship happens when we realize who we are in relationship to God and how little and insignificant we would be if we lived outside God’s love. It is with great awe that we stand in God’s presence and end up being called forth as the children of God.

This means moving thankfulness to a new level. It means not only being thankful for all we have but being thankful to God for all that we are. As we think about the things we are thankful for, you can probably think of the many things you have witnessed in your lifetime that have created a better world for you to live in.

When I was growing up, I remember the invention of the car phone. My parents couldn't afford one – but my friend in 5th grade had one. It was expensive – and this HUGE box that went in the car and plugged into the cigarette lighter adapter. They could make REAL phone calls with this car phone. Yes, it was a little bulky, but it was so nice to be able to reach my parents from the car! Before then you would have had to stop and make a call from a pay phone on the side of the road. For those of you much younger than me, they actually had these phones where you would put in a quarter and you could make a call. Fast forward to today... now we have these tiny phones that fit in our pockets that basically are a computer. Amazing stuff. But that's not all. Today we have Google!! Oh my life is better with Google. And online banking! And we're starting to test self-driving cars. And we can fly in a plane and get across the world in just a few hours! Technology is amazing.

These things are amazing... but they are not enough. We are created with a need for God. This need is only filled by God and it happens each day of grace we are given. This is the new creation the Bible talks about. And it happens, when we focus our lives on God rather than on ourselves. This is worshipping God. That worship moves us into places of not only thankfulness and gratitude but awe.

When we look at the story of the ten lepers, we encounter ten really sad people. They lived in a world where they were separated from their family and friends. They had a disease that made them not only unpleasant to be around but made them ritually unclean. That meant that other people who wanted to worship God couldn't be near them. It meant they were not allowed to go to the temple to worship God. It meant that they were also separated from God. So their cry for mercy was a last hope kind of cry. There was nowhere else to turn.

When Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priest, he was following the law. Only a priest could declare them clean. These people were totally ostracized from everyone else without having the priest give the final OK to them. So their heading for the priest was an act of faith that they would be healed. It is hard to imagine the feelings of that experience. With every step in the direction of the priest they must have felt something change, saw their skin clear, felt fingers grow back and felt an amazing change.

It is hard to not believe that in those moments, their hearts would have been filled with thankfulness like never before and in ways few have experienced. Imagine the thoughts they had! How wonderful to believe that they could get back to the lives they once had. Now they could be alive again! Their minds had to be full of everything from thankfulness and anticipation and amazement and hope, for the first time in a long time, hope.

They were putting their faith in Jesus. They were obeying his command to go to the priest. They were on their way home. It was the best day in their lives!! All those things were about them. What had happened to them. What they had received. What their future was going to be. The hope they had.

The one who came back, came back to a healing of a different kind. Ten were healed, one was made well. He was made well because his faith turned him away from himself and toward Jesus and what

Jesus had done for him. He moved beyond being thankful for what had happened and became thankful to the one who gave it to him. And he was not only thankful, but his heart was opened and overflowed with praise. He fell at the feet of Jesus and he worshiped. When he got up, he did not go back to life as usual; he went on to his life as a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. He was not only healed but was transformed.

Jesus asked a question, "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?" Who do you think he was asking that question of? I believe it was the disciples. Why would he ask them that question? I wonder if it wasn't so that they might see the difference between the nine and the one and then ask themselves where they were in their lives. Were they turned inward? Thinking of themselves? Or were they turned outward, giving thanks and praise to God?

How about us? Have we moved beyond a self-centered thankfulness to a heartfelt praise of the God who is our everything? For me, I feel like there are times when I have moments of that. This journey that we are on is a journey of faith. God is at work in who we are to bring us to that place of worship at the feet of Jesus. I don't know how to describe that perfectly because I am not perfectly there. But I do know that it happens because of a gift of grace in moments, often when I least expect it. It is a God thing. It is always a God thing.

When we peel back all the layers of the human condition-when we get to the heart of the matter-you know, we need to be amazed. Because by the grace of God, we are amazing. We are made in the image of God, who is Love.

And if you have forgotten how to love or you are too sick or hungry or worn out to love, then for God's sake, look around the borders of your life. Just where you least expect it, you might just run into grace, to healing, to Love.

In the end, we are made by Love to love for Love's sake. That's the promise, and that's the truth. And isn't that amazing?

Thanks be to God.

Amen.