

11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

This is the word of the Lord.

FIRST READING: 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

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The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup>Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. <sup>9</sup>As it is written,

"He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;  
his righteousness <sup>10</sup>endures forever."

<sup>10</sup>He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

### ***“One Heart, One Soul, One Gift Pt 3”***

I love Thanksgiving, don't you? And of course, I love it because of the food. I love to cook and eat too. I also love it when friends and family who have gathered together begin to gravitate toward the kitchen, and as the meal is prepared, the conversation and laughter just flow. I love the Thanksgiving memories I have, like sneaking olives off of the relish plate before the meal when I was a kid, and like watching my CHILDREN doing the same. My kids, however, would usually offer to “refill” the curiously empty plate...ahhh...an opportunity for more olive sneaking. I love the hours after the Thanksgiving meal, when things settle down in the house, and everyone falls asleep in front of the TV. I love also that Thanksgiving is a quieter holiday, not so commercialized. It's good to have a time to remember the important truths, the goodness of the fertile earth, the delight of good food, the gift of family and friends. All of these things are reasons why I love Thanksgiving, but you know, I think I love Thanksgiving mostly, mostly because it is (*slowly*) a time to lift up the importance of the habit and practice of gratitude!<sup>1</sup>

Gratitude...giving thanks for all our blessings is at the heart of our faith. It's central in the witness of Holy Scripture. The book of psalms, for instance, is just full of poems and hymns of gratitude for the Creator and the Creator's creation. So many of the psalms almost sound like love letters.<sup>2</sup> They drip with, they exude praise and adoration. The Call to Worship this morning was an example....*How good it is to sing praises to our God; for the Lord is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.*” The psalmists simply looked around and saw all the abundance of blessings...the rich soil with its growing trees, flowers and grasses, the amazing animals--soaring birds, swimming fish, and wild beasts, the glorious mountains, valleys, seas, deserts, the sun, moon, the stars....they saw all of it...they saw it as signs of God's goodness and presence with them. They saw themselves in the Creation and in awe, they just could not help themselves. They gave thanks.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Buchanan. *Sermon: “Thanksgiving”* <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2011/112011.html> (accessed 11/17/2017).

<sup>2</sup>Mark Douglas and Wallace Buhar, *Feasting on the Word*, p.145 Quoted by J. Buchanan in *Sermon: Thanksgiving*.

John Calvin, is famous for saying, “*There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.*”<sup>3</sup> And contemporary theologian, Karl Barth, was fond of saying that the basic human response to God is gratitude---not fear and trembling, not guilt and dread, but thanksgiving. “*What else can we say,*” he said, “*...but to stammer praise?*”<sup>4</sup> Yes, the basic human response to God’s marvelous grace towards us is gratitude.

Every Sunday, you and I, friends voice together our praise and thanksgiving to God, not only with the opening hymn which is almost always one of adoration, but always with the “Call to Worship” and the “Doxology”... “*Praise God from whom all blessings flow*”, right? We also give thanks each month when we participate in the story of our Lord on his last night, when we celebrate the Eucharist, which actually means thanksgiving.

In 1 Cor 11, we read, “*On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and GAVE THANKS ...*” Jesus modeled for us gratitude in receiving ordinary bread as a gracious gift from God. As he had likely done a thousand times, he lifted it and as he did, he lifted up the sun and the water which nourished the wheat’s kernels, the farmers who planted and harvested the crops, the women who pounded the wheat into flour, made the dough, and baked the bread in the ovens, and the animals who carried it in their carts to market. And Jesus gave thanks with a sacred contentedness, a holy joy, even the face of his imminent crucifixion. While the Greek translation of Eucharist is thanksgiving, the root of Eucharist is *charis*, which means grace, and the derivative of *charis* is *chara*, which means JOY!<sup>5</sup> Friends, giving thanks is indeed our basic human response to our gracious God, to what God has revealed to us in Creation and in the life of Christ. It also is our delight, our pleasure and satisfaction. It is our joy.

In biblical times, leprosy was the most dreaded of diseases. Actually, the term, leprosy, included a variety of skin conditions, and people with any of them not only suffered physically, but also experienced tremendous social pain. This is because in addition to being thought highly contagious, leprosy was considered punishment for sin. Lepers were often banished to live

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<sup>3</sup>John Calvin. <http://www.beliefnet.com/quotes/evangelical/j/john-calvin/there-is-not-one-blade-of-grass-there-is-no-color.aspx>. (accessed 11-17-17).

<sup>4</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3 (Edinburgh T&T Clark, 1960), 564.

<sup>5</sup>Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*, 32.

outside of town, to beg for food from a distance. They were excluded from the synagogue and their family. They were the ultimate social outcast. Lepers were feared, rejected, avoided, and condemned until the disease healed, and the priest pronounced them clean again.

One day, 10 lepers approached Jesus, calling out, “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*” Jesus responded, “*Go and see the priest.*” On their way the leprosy disappeared. The priest could now declare them safe for life in community once again. How thrilled they were. One of the ten lepers, only one, returned to thank Jesus. He knew it was God who’d healed him, and he threw himself on the ground before the Lord, overcome with joy and humbled by the divine gift. Jesus responded with “*Your faith has made you well.*” Some translations say that he said, “*Your faith has saved you.*” Regardless, what Jesus was making known was that this man’s healing was not only a medical cure and restoration of his social status, as it was with the other 9, this man was made whole. His life was redirected, made joyous, complete, because it included thankfulness.<sup>6</sup>

It is obvious that gratitude was at the heart of this man’s faith, and it seems also that he’d made the giving of thanks a habit. It was his first inclination, wasn’t it? (*pause*) Friends, when we cultivate the habit of gratitude, the joy which comes as a result is deep.”<sup>7</sup> It makes us whole and redirects our lives.

And in addition, if we make a habit of gratitude, we will be thanking God during all times, even the dark times....which surely come to all of us. Likely the leper gave thanks to God regularly, even though he had a horrible disease. He’d not have had the instinct to return to Jesus if he didn’t. There in our struggles, our dark times, a habit of gratitude will draw us to reach out, without thinking, as a matter of course, to the One who is reaching to comfort and strengthen us, the same One who lifted the bread and gave thanks on the night of his arrest. Fredrick Buechner, says this, “*Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.*” Beautiful!

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<sup>6</sup> Margit Ernt-Habib, “Theological Perspective on Luke 17:11-19” in *Feasting on the Word*, Yr C, Vol 4, eds, David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 166.

<sup>7</sup>J Buchanan.

Certainly, the pilgrims, who started the tradition of Thanksgiving 392 years ago, had the habit of practicing gratitude. One hundred and two of them left Plymouth, England in Sept of 1620, seeking a new home where they could freely practice their faith. They settled in Massachusetts several months later. Half of them died during that first New England winter. They perished of scurvy, hunger, disease and cold. Imagine it... “every family lost someone: husband lost wives, wives lost husbands, parents lost children, children lost parents.”<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Squanto and a friendly tribe of native Americans, crops like corn were planted, fertilized, and by God’s grace grew. The next fall, at the very edge of disaster, with grief and despair running so deep, the Pilgrims and the native tribespeople feasted for three days. The pilgrims’ joy was not dependent on their circumstances. They were forever in God’s care. They knew it, and they could offer always what was their habit, thanksgiving.

I still love the food and the memories and the noisy, chaotic times in the kitchen, but the reason I love Thanksgiving the most is that the habit of gratitude is front and center. I will close with a poem by a psalmist of our own time, Kathy Vick.

*You saw the universe when it was cold, void and bare.  
Did You smile when You hung the sun, in the air?  
Did sweet words of awe escape on Your tongue?  
When you first saw the beauty that You had begun?*

*Were You like an artist who gets lost in her craft?  
Did You stop in the middle, did mistakes make You laugh?  
Did Your breath, come like waves when You sketched in the moon?  
Were You finished by nightfall, did the moon leave too soon?*

*God, You gave us our morning, You crafted the night.  
You painted them both with a soft, fragile light.  
I’ve seen all the colors that You laid in the sky  
Bright ribbons of heaven that make poets sigh.*

*Tell me, did You know how amazed we would be  
When Your purples and oranges ran into the sea?  
Did you know we might cry when we saw a sunrise?  
You’d revealed who You are in our own artists’ eyes.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> John Buchanan.

<sup>9</sup> Kathy Vick. “*The Hand that Paints the Sky.*” (Green Forest, AK: New Leaf Press; 2003); 43.

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2 Cor 9:6-10, Luke 17:11-19  
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Look around, brothers and sisters. See yourselves in the Creation and in awe, give thanks.

When it becomes a habit, you will be whole and your joy will be complete. *HAPPY*

*THANKSGIVING. Amen.*