Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude
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Celebrant: The Lord be with you
People And also with you.
Celebrant Lift up your hearts.
People We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Do you hear what you and I just said? Do you hear what we just did? Like the one leper who came back we just said a big thank you to God. How many times have you heard those words? How many times have I said them? If you stop and look at our Eucharist Prayer, most of the language is one of thanks and that is a very good thing. In fact if you look in your prayer book you will see that this part of the service is entitled The Great Thanksgiving.

Here is a case where the Rite 1 language is even more appropriate and accurate to the Latin. It is meet and right so to do. The Sursam Corda, as it is known, helps balance all those prayers of petition in our Prayers of the People.

The leper knew to say thank you. The authors of our Book of Common Prayer knew to say thank you. In a world as challenging as ours think of the difference we could make if we all could have this attitude of gratitude.

We are very good at asking God for things, favors, healings a whole variety of things, but we are often more like the other nine lepers who went on their way and never stopped to say thank you when we have an answer to our prayers.

Take a moment and look at this rather remarkable story. 10 lepers are calling to Jesus from the side of the road. Lepers had to keep a long distance from other people. Leprosy was thought to be highly contagious. If even the shadow of a leper passed over you it was believed that you would be infected. So lepers were outcast and not even allowed to come anywhere close to a village or their families.

The lepers are pleading for mercy and Jesus responds. The response however is somewhat surprising. He simply tells them to go and show themselves to the priest and on the way they are healed. Notice that Jesus does not directly heal them, he simply says go and show yourselves to the priest. Go to the priests so that they see that the lepers are cleansed of their disease and allowed to return to the normal world.
Now the twist is that only one seems to notice and turn back to say thank you and that one is the true outcast, the Samaritan. The person that would be the last one expected to behave properly is the only one who does! The person even when healed is considered outcast comes back and says thank you.

Jesus then responds by saying that your faith has made you well. Now there is a lot in that short phrase. First of all is the faith word again. This is a bookend to last week’s gospel, which began with the faith of a mustard seed. Last week I spoke of what that faith was and it was faith in God, not in ourselves. This echoes that same message, but there is more. Notice Jesus does not say your faith has healed you, but that your faith has made you well. There is more to being well than just a healing. Some translations read your faith has healed and saved you. What the Samaritan gains by coming back and saying thank you is that he is truly made well. This leper is truly healed not just cleansed. The others, well their leprosy is gone, but are they truly healed?

Being well is far more than the absence of disease. To be well is a state of balance and wholeness in mind body and soul. This comes back ultimately to my concept of an attitude of gratitude. C. S. Lewis states that “praise is inner health made audible.” This is one of the reasons that I think it is so appropriate that we sing God’s praises at the start of the Prayer of Thanksgiving that I began today’s sermon with.

Karl Barth teaches that the primary response to God should be thanksgiving rather than trembling and dread. So Jesus is teaching us that the physical healing is only the start of this leper being made well. The next step is gratitude. A prayer of thanks giving or gratitude is a statement of faith. A prayer of thanksgiving acknowledges that we know where the healing came from.

I found an interesting article on a website called WebMD. If you have never visited it, I highly suggest it. I was pleasantly surprised to find an entire article on the power of gratitude in making a person well. It listed studies that showed that people with an attitude of gratitude had lower stress levels, take better care of themselves, because of their positive attitude and even had stronger immune systems. http://women.webmd.com/features/gratitude-health-boost

So how can we put this attitude of gratitude into practice. Well first of all you might consider your prayer life. Stop looking at God as a holy wishing well. I know a priest that challenged his entire congregation to give up prayers of petition for all of Lent and only say thank you to God for those 40 days. Now think about that, what a challenge that proved to be. However it does work and it can be done. Here are two examples.

I knew a husband and wife on Cape Cod. They are two of the most holy and grounded people I have ever met. He was a Roman Catholic priest and she is one of the women in the woman priest movement of the Catholic Church. They operate entirely outside of the Church but consider themselves still Catholic. They have a small but very lively congregation in Harwich Port. Jim and Marie had dreamed of starting this little church
and running a retreat center. They felt that God had called them to this ministry. So they prayed, but instead of saying, “Please God give us a place and a congregation” they prayed, “Dear God we thank you that you have found the place for our center and the people to build our congregation. We know that you will lead us and we will follow.” Several months later they found a small motel for sale that had a barn. The motel became the retreat center, the barn was turned into a wonderful chapel. Today they have outgrown that space and there prayer already is, “Thank you God for how you have blessed us and already know where our new home will be. Just show us the way.”

In the past year I have prayed to shown the way to move forward with our youth programming and God has led us to an entirely different way of working with our teens and we have been rewarded. I thank God for the gifts of the people that have made this happen. I have prayed for a way to move forward with our Outreach programs which are the focus for this coming year and we have been graced with our Deacon Dana who is in the process of beginning that work. The prayer again is that we have a vision to reach out to people who are seeking a beacon to lead them to God and I know that God already knows where we need to go. We need to thank God and follow the path even when it surprises us.

This type of prayer is truly a prayer of faith. This type of prayer shows faith that God knows what God is doing. This is a prayer where God is the pilot, not the co-pilot. This is type of prayer that is one of optimism rather than need. Even in the face of challenging times, prayers like this can move us forward rather than staying stuck in despair.

Show your faith in God this week. Say thank you to God every chance you get. Better yet trying fasting from prayers of petition and instead spend the week saying prayers of gratitude.

See how you feel after a week of praying and living with an attitude of gratitude.

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1 Bretlett, David and Taylor Barbara Taylor Editors, Feasting on the Word Year C Vol 4 (Westminster John Knox Press Louisville KY), Pg. 165
2 ibid pg 165